

HD HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 38 Issue 4 Summer 2018



CONVERSION

An ending?
A beginning?
A daily choice?

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CONTENT

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human Development Magazine is a quarterly publication for people involved in the work of fostering the human and spiritual growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care, education, counseling, healthcare and those interested in the development of the whole person.

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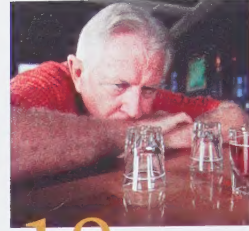
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Turn, Turn, Turn

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Summer 2018

Dear friends of Human Development:

I am delighted to share with you this issue of Human Development which focuses on the theme of conversion. Conversion as a word and a concept is often misunderstood or under-appreciated. To many, the word refers to a person leaving one religious denomination for another. For some, conversion conjures up unpleasant truths – the need to confess sins, overcome addictions or unhealthy behaviors. Scripturally, conversion involves a change of mind and heart which transforms all our relationships.

The first words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel proclaim our theme: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." Rembrandt's depiction of the conversion of the "Good Thief" graces the cover of our issue. While every conversion marks an ending and a beginning, clearly the conversation of Jesus and Dismas is a most dramatic conversion.

While conversion is a turning away from something/someone, more importantly, it concerns a turning toward something/someone. In our Judeo Christian tradition, conversion is a joyful response to the call of God. Conversion opens new doors for a deeper relationship with God and others. Conversion is very intensely personal and yet there is also a communal aspect; as the very word implies, we "turn together."

There are many types of conversion. Bernard Lonergan, SJ, spoke about conversion happening as a person changes the horizon of their perspective or viewpoint. For instance, in his reflection on the four stages of human consciousness, conversion takes a person from experience to understanding, from understanding to judgment, from judgment to action and from action to new experience. Conversion is the "spark-plug" at every step or transition on the way. Lonergan also speaks of conversion to believing in God, a conversion to Christ and to the Church; we could also have an intellectual conversion or moral conversion.

In conversion, we do not so much deny past failures or struggles but integrate them in a positive way. The ultimate goal of conversion is becoming a transformed person, more open to God and to others. The conversion of one person impacts families and communities. The call to conversion is a very personal experience but also a summons, a call to be part of a communion of believers who are also in the process of life-long conversion.

While each of us need some conversion, so does the Church itself. As the Council Fathers of Vatican II proclaimed in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "The Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal." (Art. 8) In other words, even the Church is always in a state of conversion and hence we have seasons of repentance and renewal. In fact, conversion is a daily necessity, a sign of vitality, courage and hope, the desire for an ever more abundant life in the Lord.

The lead essay in this issue comes to us from Dr. Patricia Cooney-Hathaway, Professor of Spirituality at Sacred Heart Major Seminary and a member of our Editorial Board. She frames her essay on conversion with Christ's words from John 10:10, "I have come to bring you life, life in abundance." By studying the lives of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and Bishop Oscar Romero, she helps us understand the pattern of conversion at work in our own lives.

Jeff Jay, a Clinical Interventionist and author of works on addiction and intervention, speaks about conversion from the perspective of addiction and recovery. He specifically addresses the question of relapse in conversion/therapy, noting that for conversion to be complete, our story must be shared with others.

Dr. Susan Muto reflects on growing into spiritual maturity; that is, converting from lukewarm faith to a more profound dependence on God. Building on insights from St. Bonaventure, she describes six dispositions necessary for genuine conversion.

Father Ben Harrison, a Missionary of Charity, offers an autobiographical reflection on the long, slow, unfolding process of conversion. He reminds us that there is no "quick fix" in the spiritual life.

Dr. Wilkie Au and Dr. Noreen Au reflect on the experience of shame that can prevent us from moving closer to God or to others. They provide some meditations for healing of shame, particularly experiences of shame from childhood.

Dr. Michael Downey writes from his experience of having spent extended time teaching theology and spirituality in Vietnam. He notes the challenges of intimacy in a culture where people live in extremely close physical proximity. His essay is an excellent presentation of the challenges of coming to conversion through meaningful conversations.

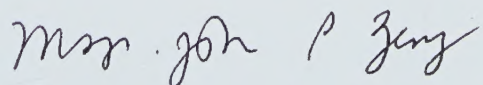
Father Phil Cooke, SJ, shares an intensely personal and beautiful story of conversion born out of his ministerial experience with the Lakota Tribe in South Dakota. He experiences the answers to his questions and prayers as he preaches.

Finally, Irish Christian Brother Sean Moffett writes of religious communities dealing with loss and diminishment and ways to become more resilient as individuals and communities. He uses the image of the 10th station of the cross – Jesus stripped of His garments – as a way to speak of how we must all be empty of self to build up the larger community.

Using the various types of conversion as points for reflection, I prepared a conclusion to the issue with a personal examen/Penance service.

As you read through the essays, I urge you to let their thoughts and insights stretch and challenge you that you might turn all the more whole-heartedly to the Lord and others. Let us pray for our own conversion and the conversion our world needs.

Your brother in the Lord,



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***“This is the time of fulfillment.
The Kingdom of God is at
hand. Repent and believe in the
Gospel.” (Mark 1:15)***

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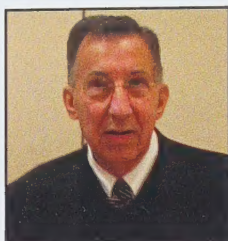
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October 3-5, 2018
Walking with the Wounded
Guest House Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

October 18, 2018
Detroit Bishop's Dinner
Blessed Sacrament Cathedral &
Detroit Institute of Arts Museum
Detroit, MI

November 2, 2018
All Souls' Day Mass & Luncheon
Guest House-Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

December 6, 2018
Advent Vespers
Guest House-Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

January 7-10, 2019
Men's Alumni Winter Seminar
DiamondHead Beach Resort
Fort Myers Beach, FL

January 14-17, 2019
Women's Alumni Winter Retreat
DiamondHead Beach Resort
Fort Myers Beach, FL

June 28- July 5, 2019
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Galway, Killarney & Dublin

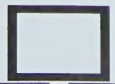
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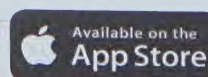
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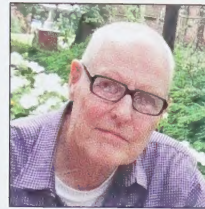
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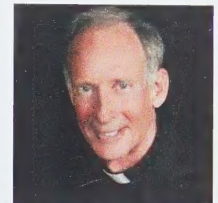
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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The editors of *Human Development* are quite eager to publish articles that translate the latest research in psychology, health, medicine, and spirituality to ministry, formation and practice. Our hope is that *Human Development* will be known as the most user-friendly ministry publication. This will require making complicated theoretical knowledge, research, and concepts understandable and applicable to the personal and professional lives of our readers.

Since ministry is in a time of significant transition and change, we anticipate that the articles we publish will enlighten and positively influence the daily decisions and practices of those in Church leadership, ministry formation, spiritual direction, and counseling of any kind. There are also a number of previously under-appreciated forces that uniquely influence ministry and ministers: cultural, organizational, and situational factors. We intend to highlight and honor these factors in the pages of *Human Development*. Accordingly, we ask prospective authors to be mindful of these considerations in their manuscripts.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than six recommended citations and/or readings; filler

items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting sacred scripture, the New Revised Standard Version is preferred. All manuscripts are to be prepared according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition).

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and Bibliography/suggested readings. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Manuscripts should be submitted to Msgr. John Zenz at editor@hdmag.org as an email attachment.



LIFE IN ABUNDANCE

THE JOURNEY OF CONVERSION

Dr. Patricia Cooney-Hathaway



In John's gospel Jesus states, "I have come to bring you life, life in abundance." (John 10:10)

Our response to Jesus' desire for us necessitates our willingness to enter into a process of conversion. The conversion we are speaking about here is not a conversion to a new religion as such; rather it involves the re-orientation of one's whole life. The Greek word, *metanoia*, describes conversion as a radical turning or redirection of our lives. "The time has come," Jesus said, "and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe in the Good News." (Mark 1:14-15). The Hebrew word *shub* describes a more comforting description of conversion as a coming home to God's unconditional love. (Luke 15: 1-32) Both words convey an experience of God that dramatically changes the course of one's life. This transformation does not occur overnight. It involves the long, day after day, year after year struggle through darkness and confusion as well as deep joy and happiness as we discover our true selves in God.



As a professor of spirituality, I have had the privilege of teaching many courses that deal with the topic of conversion. Over the years I have found that the one approach that has been most helpful to students both for their own lives and the lives of those to whom they minister is that of Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J. The basic premise, throughout his writings, is that the human person has a radical desire to reach out, to move beyond and to enter into the process of self-transcendence which leads to a life of authenticity and integration. Thus, Lonergan describes conversion as not merely a change or even a development but a radical transformation which follows on all levels of our being: religious, moral, and intellectual. He also emphasizes that such conversion is found in our experience. Thus conversion is uniquely personal and historical. Other theologians such as Robert Doran, Walter Conn, and Bishop Edward Braxton have expanded Lonergan's modes of conversion to include the affective, ecclesial and social dimensions of the human person. I have found that what students particularly appreciate are the descriptions of the modes of conversion. In the words of one student, "Conversion has always been something vague and abstract for me until you put it in the context of the modes of conversion. They provide a concrete guide for assessing one's growth and identifying one's blind spots."

These modes of conversion come alive when they

are viewed through the life stories of real men and women. Their conversions help us to make sense of our own. The plan of this essay, then, is to provide a brief description of the modes of conversion, and then illustrate how they find expression in the life stories of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and Oscar Romero. Each of these great friends of God demonstrate for us that there are optimal times in our lives when different modes of conversion take center-stage as we work through and integrate various dimensions of our personality in our quest for a life of authenticity and integration - the goal of the conversion process. Space permits us to reflect on only a few of the most significant conversion experiences in each of their lives.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Fr. Lonergan describes religious conversion as a falling in love with God in an unrestricted fashion. It involves the discovery of God as real. Lonergan emphasizes that falling in love with God is not our initiative but God's; that is, in the words of Romans 5: "God floods our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:5) I am reminded of Blaise Pascal's dramatic encounter with God - the one he wrote about and sewed into the liner of his coat.

"The year of grace 1654....from about half past ten in the evening
Until half past midnight.

FIRE

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,'
not of Philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

God of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God.

'Thy God shall be my God'

The world forgotten, and everything except
God."

All of us know from our own experience that falling in love is just the beginning of a relationship.

Learning to love - a love that combines eros, the drive toward communion and agape, a love that puts the well-being of others above our own - is a life-long challenge for all of us.

INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

Intellectual conversion occurs when a person begins to change his or her way of looking at reality. I recall a seminarian saying to me, "I just want to know the Truth!" This young man was involved in the unrelenting desire to understand and make sense of life on a cognitive level, raising the questions, who am I? Who is God? What is the meaning of life? Who is God? It is not just a knowing, but a knowing that leads to insight about the truth that guides our lives.

MORAL CONVERSION

Moral conversion leads to the awareness that, as one matures, the criterion for decision-making must evolve from self-satisfaction to the pursuit of value. Most importantly, moral conversion involves the struggle to attain self-consistency between the values one affirms and the deeds one incarnates. It involves the never-ending quest for authenticity in one's public as well as private worlds.

AFFECTIVE CONVERSION

Psychic or Affective conversion attends to the important role emotions play in revealing the truth and value of our lives. It involves the celebration of life's joys as well as the healing of life's wounds. It centers on feelings, emotions, compulsions; the facing of self-destructive attitudes and strategies that can block our desires for healthy growth and development.

ECCLESIAL CONVERSION

Ecclesial conversion involves the turn to others; the recognition of our need for community. It is based on the recognition that we become who we are in

and through our relationships. For the Christian this community is made up of those who come together as disciples of Jesus Christ, and who we wish to celebrate and perpetuate that discipleship through word, sign, sacrament and deed.

SOCIAL CONVERSION

Social conversion involves a reprioritization of one's values in recognition of injustices within society. Such an awakening leads to a commitment to bring God's kingdom of love, peace, and justice into the world. This conversion recognizes the distinction between private charity and social justice: Private charity is concerned with caring for the needs of those around us. Social Justice is dedicated to the eradication of the institutions of injustice that make up the culture of death: poverty, war, racism, sexism, pornography, abortion, sexual trafficking of women and children, etc.

Lonergan emphasizes that Christian conversion is not one more conversion to be added to all the others, but the specific shape these conversions take when viewed through the lens of Jesus' life and values. He also identifies important principles that govern our journey of conversion:

- 1) God comes to us in our history; that is, our journey of conversion does not call us away from life, but to enter more fully and deeply into our own humanity with all its ambiguities.
- 2) The modes of conversion do not normally occur in a chronological sequence; they overlap and interpenetrate as we mature in our Christian identity.
- 3) One mode of conversion may not be as fully developed as another in a person's life. To see how these modes of conversion come alive in the lives of real people is both fascinating and uplifting as we note how uniquely God loves and guides each of us to the discovery of our true selves in Him.



THOMAS MERTON

Origen, a third century theologian, stated that the spiritual journey is long and convoluted. Surely that observation is true about Thomas Merton. He was born on January 31, 1915 in Prades, France to Owen Merton, a New Zealand painter and Ruth Jenkins, an American Quaker and artist. Merton was baptized in the Church of England, following his father's wishes, yet, he had no official introduction to religion of any kind by his parents. The first three years of his life were a time of happiness and contentment as his parents doted on his every word and new discovery. But tragedy struck early as Merton learned of his mother's struggle with and death from stomach cancer. Looking back on his life at the tender age of 8, in his autobiography, *Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton states,

"When I was eight years old, running loose among the rocks and the prickly pears of Somerset Island, Bermuda, I was in just the position of divorced parents. My father wanted to take care of me, but he did not precisely know how. I was without a family, without a school, without a church. I had no morals and no God. I would not even be able to say if there was such a thing."

Tragedy struck again, when at the age of 15, Merton learned his father had died of a brain tumor. At that time he described himself as an orphan, alone in the world.

There were many experiences, but we will fast forward to his college years at Columbia University. Merton had been reading widely for several years. He was especially fond of Freud and Marx. His involvement with Communist thought seemed to give him interior peace: "I was in the thick of conversion. It was not the right conversion, but it was a conversion." In 1937, his life was forever changed when he picked up *Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* by Etienne Gilson. This was his first encounter with a way of understanding the God of Christianity. The word that quite literally opened a whole new world to him was the Latin, *aseitas*. It meant "the power of a being to exist absolutely in virtue of itself." (SSM, 172). "I had never had an adequate notion of what Christians meant by God," he stated. "I think one reason for my profound satisfaction with what I now read was that God had been vindicated in my own mind. This dismantled my former image of God as 'a dramatic and passionate character, a value, jealous, hidden being.'" (SSM 173) Merton's conversion to a Christian concept of God - one that his restless intellect could accept - was the beginning of his ecclesial conversion; that is, his desire to enter the Catholic Church.

"All of a sudden something began to stir in me. It was a movement that spoke like a voice: 'What are you waiting for? Why are you sitting here? Why do you hesitate? You know what you ought to do. Why don't you do it?' I stirred in my chair. I lit a cigarette, looked outside the window at the rain, tried to shut up the voice. 'Don't act on impulses,' I thought. 'This is crazy. Read your book.' But the voice persisted. Merton got on his raincoat. 'And then everything inside me began to sing - to sing with peace, to sing with strength, and to sing with conviction.' At the rectory, 'Father, I want to become a Catholic.'" (SSM, 216)

Merton's entrance into the Catholic Church was soon followed by a desire for priesthood which found expression in his acceptance by the Trappist community at Gethsemane Monastery near Louisville, Kentucky. Merton was 27 years old. As he walked through the door of the monastery, Merton had a profound experience of finally coming home. And in describing the fulfillment of his dream of priesthood, Merton would state, "This is the one great secret for which I was born."

In many ways it is difficult to separate Merton's moral from his affective conversion. Moral conversion calls us to move out of a life of self-satisfaction to one of value. That shift will only take place when we find ourselves loving another or others in such a way that we put their well-being before our own. Merton's friends and mentor, particularly teacher and mentor Van Doren at Columbia University, helped Merton put the hedonistic years of his past behind him as these friendships brought stability and joy to his life, and helped him to go outside of himself in a movement of self-transcending love. Another significant, life-changing example of affective conversion was his experience at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, when at forty-three years of age he took his first trip out of the monastery in seven years "At the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another, even though we were total strangers. This experience was like waking up from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness." (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 157) This experience had a profound impact on Merton's spiritual and social conversion. What followed was an intentional shift in his life and writings from a spirituality of withdrawal to a spirituality of involvement. He acknowledged that it was not the world that was evil, but his own unresolved issues that he had projected onto the world. He stated emphatically that the monk must

avoid being a "guilty bystander" - the title of one of his books which expresses Merton's growing awareness in the 1950's and 1960's of concern for and involvement in the social and political dimensions of life, especially the issues of racism and peace.



The underlying motivation for the gradually confronting and integrating of these dimensions of life can only be found in Merton's spiritual conversion. In the words of theologian Walter Conn, "religious conversion is not just a process of becoming "religious" but a totally radical reorientation of one's entire life, of one's very self that allows God's own loving life to move in from the edges and corners of our lives to take possession of our hearts and to permeate our very being" (*The Desiring Self*, 128). Merton's final religious experience before the giant Buddhas at Polonnaruwa in Ceylon as well as his writings on contemplation, attest to a life permeated by his transforming union with God. "If we enter into ourselves, find our true self, and then pass "beyond" the inner "I" we sail forth into the immense darkness in which we confront the "I AM" of the Almighty." (*Inner Experience*, 9)



DOROTHY DAY

Dorothy was born on the 8th of November in 1897 in Brooklyn. She was the third of five children. Her father, John Day, was a newspaper man, a sports writer whose specialty was the race track. Dorothy's talent for writing came from her father. Her mother, Grace Satterlee, a stay-at-home-mom, was always remembered by Dorothy with grateful affection, a mother as near to her as her father was remote. Dorothy's earliest religious experience took place when the Day family lived in California. She was around seven years old. Dorothy was playing school with her sister, Della, in the attic of the family home when she came upon a musty old bible. She began reading the Bible to her sister: "Slowly, as I read, a new personality impressed itself on me. I was being introduced to someone. I knew almost immediately

that I was discovering God. Here was someone that I had never really known before and yet felt to be One whom I would never forget, that I would never get away from." (Union Square, 20) Dorothy knew her life would be forever changed. This religious experience became the motivating force behind Dorothy's unrelenting search for God through the joyful and often difficult moments of conversion that were to follow. Reflecting back on her life, Dorothy stated, "All my life I have been tormented by God," a character in one of Dostoevsky's books says. And that is the way it was with me." (Union Square, 19)

The mode of conversion that played an all-encompassing role in Dorothy's life was her social conversion. It began in her last year of high school where she was exposed to radical politics through her brother's newspaper job with, *The Day Book*. This publication described the harsh working conditions in the factories and department stores of Chicago. Dorothy began taking long walks toward the west side of Chicago. In her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, she states, "I walked for miles, pushing my brother in his carriage exploring interminable streets, fascinating in their dreary sameness, past tavern after tavern, exploring the slums of Chicago." Walking these streets as a 15 year old, she pondered the plight of the poor and the workers and felt, "from then on my life was to be linked with theirs; their interests would be mine...I had received a call, a vocation, a direction in my life. I wanted to play my part, I wanted to do something toward making a "New Earth wherein justice dwells." (Union Square, 37)

This discovery of her vocation led to the beginning of Dorothy's moral conversion. While at the University of Illinois, Dorothy strove to attain moral consistency between the values she espoused "I was tearing myself away from home, living on my own, and I had to choose the world to which I wanted to belong." (*The Long Loneliness*, 42) Dorothy intentionally became part of the working poor. She chose to live a simple life, to earn her keep through

manual labor; she was often out of work and money; she knew what it meant to “taste the hardship of poverty.” It was during this time that Dorothy raised what she called the “great question.”

“Why was so much done in remedying social evils instead of avoiding them in the first place?Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery? (LL 45)

Dorothy would soon experience the consequences of her choices. In the spring of 1917 she joined suffragists in Washington picketing in front of the White House to protest the exclusion of women from voting. She, with a friend, was arrested, imprisoned, and placed in solitary confinement. This experience was a wakeup call to her naiveté and idealism. She asked for a bible. As she prayed the psalms, she experienced a profound solidarity with the brokenness and sinfulness of humankind. “The only thoughts that brought comfort to my soul were the lines from the Psalms that expressed the terror and misery of man suddenly stricken and abandoned....I was that drug addict, I was that shop lifter, I was that woman who killed her children, who had murdered her lover. The blackness of hell was all around me.” (Union Square, 7)

A second mode of conversion that had a profound impact on Dorothy’s spiritual life was her affective conversion. Through a friend, Dorothy met Forster Batterham. In her autobiography she describes him as an anarchist, an Englishman by descent and a biologist. She also admitted that he was an atheist and an opponent of all institutions. Dorothy fell in love with Forster and he with her. For the first time in her life, Dorothy truly believed that her partner loved her. She found a degree of peace and happiness in their love that she had not experienced before in human relationships. This experience of the joy of loving and being loved led her to God. “I could not see that the love between a man and a woman was incompatible with the love of God...It is because through a whole love, both physical and spiritual, that I came to know God.” (LL 135) Dorothy was

filled with gratitude and began to pray. Years later, in an interview with Robert Coles, Dorothy stated, “I don’t think prayer for me has only been connected with sadness and misery....When I felt joy and fulfillment in this world, I have always wanted to say thank you.” (Coles, Dorothy Day: *A Radical Devotion*, 56)

Dorothy discovered she was pregnant at the age of 28. She was overjoyed. Unfortunately, Forster did not share Dorothy’s bliss about parenthood. He didn’t believe in bringing children into such a violent, toxic world. He also became irritated at her growing interest in God and religion. Tamar Teresa was born on March 4, 1926. She occasioned Dorothy’s ecclesial conversion. “No human creature could receive or contain so vast a flood of love and joy as I often felt after the birth of my child. With this came the need to worship and adore.” (LL 139) Dorothy decided to have Tamar baptized in the Catholic Church. She wanted her daughter to have a moral structure and a community that she never had. She knew that decision would probably lead to the end of her relationship with Forster. She struggled fiercely with this decision. “I did not want to be alone. I did not want to give up a human love when it was dearest and tenderest.” (LL 145) But she also felt strongly that she wanted her child to believe and “if belonging to a church would give her so inestimable a grace as faith in God and the companionable love of the saints. Then the thing to do was to have her baptized a Catholic.” (LL 145) In December 1927, Dorothy followed her daughter’s baptism with her own. Her motivation challenges the rationalization of many today who state they are spiritual but not religious. “I had heard many say that they wanted to worship God in their own way, and did not need a church in which to praise Him or a body of people with whom to associate themselves. But I disagree with this. My very experience as a radical, my whole make-up, led me to want to associate myself with others, with the masses, in loving and praising God. (LL 139)

Five years following her entrance into the Catholic Church, Dorothy was searching to find a way to support herself and Tamar through work which linked her religious faith, her commitment to social justice and her vocation as a writer. Everything came together in her meeting with Peter Maurin. He had developed a program of Catholic social action and he wanted Dorothy to help him implement it. Through his influence, Dorothy realized that she did not need to leave behind her concern for issues of social justice, but found that they resonated with the best of the Church's moral and social teaching. The intellectual conversion she experienced through Maurin's instruction provided the principles upon which the Catholic Worker Movement and her commitment to corporal and spiritual works of mercy would be based.

The many years that followed in her life bear witness to the deepening interpenetration and integration of these modes of conversion. In his book, *My Life with the Saints*, Fr. James Martin, S.J., summarizes the powerful impact of Dorothy's life. "In 1973, at the age of 76, Dorothy was arrested and jailed for her participation in a United Farm Workers rally supporting Cesar Chavez and the rights of migrant workers. A striking black and white photograph taken that day, shows the birdlike, gray haired woman wearing a second-hand dress and sitting on a folding chair. Dorothy gazes up calmly at two burly police officers, armed, who tower over her. It is a portrait of a lifetime of commitment, the dignity of discipleship, and the absolute rightness of the gospel."

OSCAR ROMERO

Oscar Romero was born August 15, 1917. He was the second oldest boy of eight children to Santos Romero and Guadalupe de Jesus Galdamez. His family were very devout Catholics. They lived in the town of Ciudad Barrios, in the territory of San Miguel. Romero's journey of conversion was much like most of those who grow up in a Catholic family; that is, a gradual process lived out in the context of

a committed Christian life. A biography of Romero described him as a very pious child, attracted to solitude, prayer and a vocation to the priesthood. At the age of 13 his father arranged for him to apprentice with a carpenter. Neither his father nor mother encouraged further education or his dream of the priesthood. Oscar sought out the town's mayor to intercede on his behalf. His father relented and allowed Oscar to attend the minor seminary in San Miguel.



Romero's seminary formation lasted from 1930 to 1942. He established a reputation as an above average student who was prayerful, virtuous and concerned with service to others. He was ordained on April 4, 1942. Those who knew him described him as the "quintessential Churchman," one who throughout his life represented the Church in positions of leadership. His reputation as a hard worker and a perfectionist led to increasing administrative duties for the Church. He was consecrated auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador in 1970 and Bishop of the Diocese of Santiago de Maria in 1974.

Fr. Romero's journey of conversion began in earnest in 1966 when he made a retreat at the Francisco Retreat Center. He was 48 years old and in the midst of a mid-life crisis. After nearly twenty-five years of ministry he felt physically and emotionally depleted by the demands of his responsibilities and the consequences of his decisions. Clearly he was in the midst of an affective conversion as he described the lack of intimacy and the painful loneliness in his life. He acknowledged that his rigidity and

demanding attitude had provoked the animosity of his fellow priests. He admitted his difficulty with controlling his temper; his obsession with perfection of himself and others; his repressed sexuality and fear of intimacy which prevented him from establishing wholesome and life-giving friendships. (See Damian Zynda, Archbishop Oscar Romero) Two members of the retreat team - Fr. Juan Izquierdo, his spiritual director, and Dr. Dardano, a psychiatrist - were invaluable in helping Fr. Romero gain insight into his character and personality. Dr. Dardano diagnosed Fr. Romero as having an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCPD). Fr. Juan Izquierdo recognized the religious expression of this personality disorder and helped Fr. Romero deal with his perfectionism and scrupulosity. Romero deeply appreciated their efforts to help him gain insight into his behavior. He began in earnest to work on these blocks to healthy human and spiritual development by consciously developing more positive attitudes and behaviors. He also rededicated and recommitted himself to serving God and others in a more loving and personal way.

Romero's intellectual conversion began in earnest in 1970, when as Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, he registered for a week-long pastoral conference whose purpose was to discuss the results of the Medellin Conference of Latin American bishops and to determine how they would implement the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. He lasted one day. He could not accept the theology and pastoral practices recommended by the Council. He began to oppose them, writing an article entitled "Medellin, Misunderstood and Misinterpreted."

While Romero was resisting the implementation of the Second Vatican Council's vision, he was, at the same time, forced to confront the growing oppression and violence toward the campesinos as they struggled to improve their lives. Within three years, Romero underwent a radical, social conversion that had profound implications for himself, for the poor, and for the Church. Life experience, particularly relationships, often serve as

a catalyst for conversion. Such was true for Romero. Initially, Romero had aligned himself with the twelve oligarch families who controlled the vast wealth of El Salvador. He also had supported government policies and denied the government's involvement in the widespread disappearance, torture and murder of civilians. Three life experiences changed all that. First, on June 21, 1978, the massacre of Las Tres Callas opened his eyes to the violence perpetrated by the military. National Guardsmen shot and hacked to death six men from the Astorgas family for their efforts to educate and catechize their people. This incident forced Romero to confront the brutality of the military. It also motivated him to undertake a serious study of the Medellin documents as well as Pope Paul VI's encyclical, "On Evangelization in the Modern World." He acknowledged that he had misunderstood the message of the Vatican Council documents. Second, his mind and heart were opened and his compassion increased as he listened to the heart-breaking stories of widows, mothers and daughters describe the episodes of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons who were taken from their homes, tortured, mutilated or killed right in front of them. Finally, the experience that crystallized his conversion was the assassination of Fr. Rutilio Grande, S.J., a friend, teacher and former rector of the national seminary who was very popular among the priests and laity. His death unmasked the true oppression of the government and anyone who sought to help the poor rise out of their poverty and oppression. The government did not anticipate the activity and influence of the Church under the leadership of a bishop who had been transformed by his love for and commitment to his people. Romero decided that there would be one mass on Sunday, March 20th at the diocesan cathedral as a communal expression of mourning and in protest of Fr. Grande's murder. Romero increased his preaching against the oppression which continued and expanded. He began to receive death threats. An excerpt from a conversation with Dr. Jorge Lara-Braud illustrates the distance Bishop Romero had traveled on his conversion journey.

"I'll tell you the truth, doctor. I don't want to die. At least not now. I've never had so much love for life! And honestly, I don't think I was meant to be a martyr. I don't feel the calling. Of course, if that's what God asks of me then there is nothing I can do. I only ask that the circumstances of my death do not leave any doubt as to what my true vocation is: to serve God and to serve my people. But I don't want to die now. I want to live a little longer." (Zynda, "Thesis," 55)

Bishop Romero was assassinated two days later while celebrating the Eucharist. Once again, we witness the powerful influence and impact of a dedicated Christian who allowed himself to be changed and transformed through decisive moments in his journey of conversion. Damian Zynda insightfully describes how grace transforms human nature when one is open to God's loving yet challenging action in one's life.

"Bishop Oscar Romero began as a conservative supporter of the government and an enemy of its opponents. He grew into and finally died as an outspoken advocate for human rights. Along the way he grew from a fearful, ecclesial autocrat into a courageous, collaborative leader who displayed an energy, self-confidence, interior freedom, joy and self-integration heretofore unseen." (Zynda, Thesis, 56)

CONCLUSION

I began this essay by sharing with you Fr. Bernard Lonergan's description of conversion and the modes of conversion through which the journey of conversion finds expression. To realize that there are various dimensions of the human person that seek integration reminds us that the journey of conversion does not take place in a day but rather necessitates the commitment of a lifetime. We saw these modes of conversion come alive through the life stories of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day

and Oscar Romero. Their graced response to the challenges of the conversion process illustrates for us how uniquely and personally God is involved in each of our lives, drawing us to wholeness and holiness. Hopefully their conversion stories help us make sense of our own and those to whom we minister. Most importantly, each of them illustrates for us that grace works in and through our human nature; that is, the conversion process does not take us away from life but calls us to meet God in all the experiences of our lives, especially those optimal times when different modes of conversion take center stage and seek resolution and integration. This awareness is especially important for those of us involved in the ministries of spiritual guidance, spiritual direction, and pastoral counseling. Each day, through the challenges we face, like Merton, Dorothy Day and Romero, we are being invited to some new form of conversion – that is, we are being invited to "a more abundant life."

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Thomas Merton sign photo attribute:
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Thomas Merton room photo attribute:
Bryan Sherwood

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Dr. Cooney-Hathaway frames her essay on conversion by Christ's words in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly." She explains that all types or modes of conversion involve a letting go of past fears or anger and an openness to new possibilities, a whole new way of living. Reflect on your life-conversions and how they opened doors for you to live more abundantly. Consider also areas/ways where you might be resisting deeper abundance. Would such a discussion be helpful if you were accompanying someone in counselling or spiritual direction?
2. In the life of Thomas Merton, conversion began unfolding as he came to understand the Christian God and through the altruistic and self-sacrificing love of good friends. The experience of "Fourth and Walnut" in downtown Louisville brought it all together for him: God could be found in every relationship; Merton entered into involvement in social concerns of the day. Have I had a "Fourth and Walnut" turning point when I suddenly realized I was already in communion with God through others?
3. For Dorothy Day, it seems that social awareness and desire to be God's change agent took her into deeper communion with God in prayers of thanks and in reading the Psalms. These concerns led her to recognize her need for the Church. Have I had an "ecclesial" conversion – if so, how and when? If not, pray for it for yourself and others around you.
4. Archbishop Oscar Romero's conversion process involved a mid-life crisis as he dealt with perfectionism and scrupulosity; he opened his heart to intimacy and friendship especially with the poor – and that changed everything! Who are the "poor" in my life that might be my own means of discovering a life of greater spiritual abundance?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Cooney Hathaway authored the book, *Weaving Faith and Experience: A Woman's Perspective* as part of a Call to Holiness Series on Catholic Women's Spirituality, published by St. Anthony Messenger Press.

In addition, she co-authored a successful Lilly Foundation grant of \$1.5 million for the education and formation of ecclesial lay ministers. She has been the Project Director for the implementation of this grant. She has also received the Pope John Paul II Memorial, The Splendor of Truth Award, by the Catholic Lawyers Guild, Diocese of Lansing, Michigan.



ADDICTION, CONVERSION, & RELAPSE PREVENTION

Jeff Jay



INTRODUCTION: HOW CONVERSION AND ADDICTION RECOVERY OVERLAP

What do religious conversion and addiction recovery have in common?

Conversion is an awakening, and the formation of a new identity. It may begin dramatically, like the conversion of Saul, or it may develop haltingly over many years. In either case, it takes time, the help of other people and the grace of God to change Saul to Paul. In the process, there are times of great consolation and gratitude and times of desolation and darkness. As impatient as Paul could be with the Galatians, he was even more disappointed in himself. Yet Christ assured him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (II Corin. 12:9)

Recovery is an awakening, and the formation of a new identity. It may begin dramatically, like the white-light experience of Bill Wilson, or it may develop haltingly with multiple relapses. In either case, it takes time, the help of others, and the grace of God to achieve contented sobriety. There are times of gratitude, and there are times of severe temptation. As impatient as we may get with people who relapse and cause other people pain, we are even more disappointed in ourselves when we cannot overcome our own defects of character.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTIAN CONVERSION AND TWELVE STEP RECOVERY?

Conversion is ultimately focused on the growth and salvation of the human soul. Its scope is at once intimate and eternal, boring into our innermost self, and stretching out beyond time. Conversion is rooted in our relationship with Jesus, and what He has done for us. Consider: infinite God becomes finite man, clears a path for us through His own suffering, death and resurrection and guides each one of us beyond the reach of evil and into eternal life. There is nothing which lies outside the bounds of this drama, and every individual human being is a critical character in the story. The transformation described by the word *metanoia* lies at the heart of conversion.

Recovery is focused on perhaps the most intractable problem of human life: addiction, a physical, psychological, and spiritual malady that compromises the will of the afflicted individual. Recovery is rooted in the here-and-now, in the

fight against temptation, unnatural appetites and self-destruction. The process of moving from the isolation of a chronic illness into a community of survivors is the return route to health and balance. Experience shows that recovery is “contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition,” even though the disorder is known to have a major genetic component, as well as co-occurring psychological factors. To be successful, one must rely on the grace of God, as expressed through other people and in the mysterious workings of the human heart.

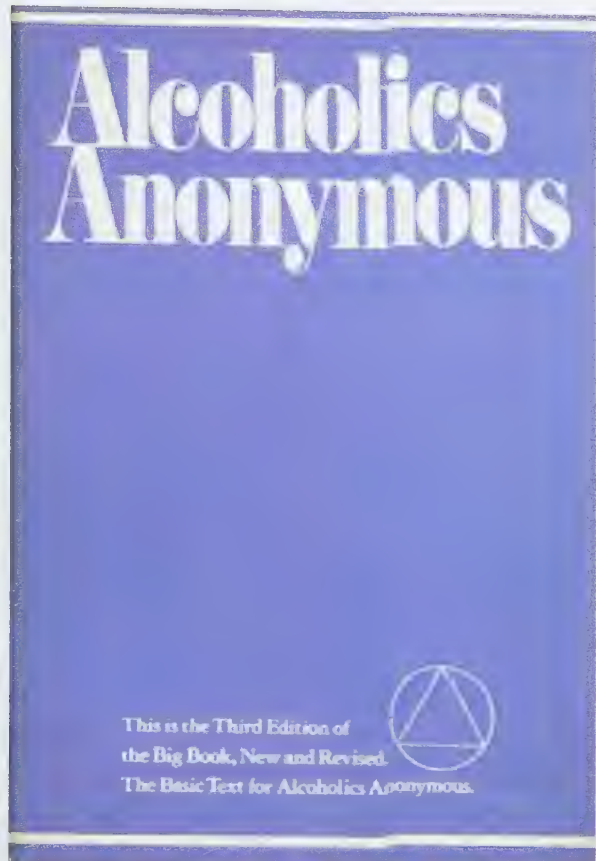
Recovery is a form of conversion, and probably the most effective means yet developed to overcome what was once considered an intractable sin. The process is straightforward, but paradoxical in that the individual must admit defeat in order to regain control.

CONVERSION AND RECOVERY THROUGH SURRENDER

When I was a hopeless alcoholic and drug addict living on the street, I didn't believe recovery was possible. My downward spiral had accelerated to the point of no return, and I was seemingly beyond the help of family and friends. Fortunately, they prayed for me when I could not, and took action when I would not. I was an atheist in those days, forgoing even foxhole prayers. Suicide seemed like a reasonable option.

An unconventional intervention resulted in my being hospitalized, detoxed over a period of ten days, and then transferred into a month-long

“The process of moving from the isolation of a chronic illness into a community of survivors is the return route to health and balance.”



confession, repentance, and the like may be missing, but they are crystalized in the literature of the program very clearly. Indeed the Twelve Steps may be the most practical application of these principles in our current era.

There was no recovery for me until I surrendered. In that midnight hour of despair, I knew that I couldn't contend with my demons alone, and that I was destined for failure, and probably death. I was overwhelmed with regret and hopelessness. Everything changed when I got down on my knees and cried out to God from the depth of my soul. In a moment outside time, the light burst through and annihilated the darkness, freeing me from the bondage of my illness. I was in the presence of Christ, and my new life was born in a rapture. I knew I could stay sober, because I was no longer relying on myself alone. I was overwhelmed with gratitude.

The word *metanoia* is rich with meaning. Jesus calls us to repent, change our minds, change our hearts, bear new fruit, be converted, live differently, come to believe, spread the good news, and more. Its implications are challenging, exhorting us to something we can immediately understand, yet never fully accomplish.

The word recovery is also pregnant with meaning. We get clean and sober, surrender to win, come to believe, clean house, make amends, and live our lives "happy, joyous and free." It is not an event, but an ongoing process, and there is no graduation. It means much more than simply quitting our drug of choice or compulsive behavior. It is necessary to stop the behavior, but stopping by itself, without an active program of recovery, is a recipe for misery, and will likely lead to a relapse.

An addict who quits their addiction through will power alone is like the religious convert who uses will power alone to amend their behaviors. Where is God in the process? Where is grace? How can we move from the isolation of our defects and the shame

inpatient treatment program. The most prominent physical aspects of the disease were addressed in the detoxification process, and the psychological aspects of the illness were addressed during the many individual and group counseling sessions that followed. Still, my core belief system stood as a barrier to progress. I still wanted to be in control.

In this dark season of my life, I was the final authority on all issues. Of course, I had almost killed myself with alcohol and drugs, so the wisdom of my choices was suspect—even to me—but I dismissed the notion of God. I was determined to think my way out of the problem, yet I knew when it came to addiction my thinking was inherently untrustworthy. No matter how I tried to frame the issue, I seemed destined to fail. I was technically sober, but I had not overcome my alcoholism.

The conversion process from the hell of active addiction to the deliverance of active recovery embraces all the possible definitions of *metanoia*. In the language of the Twelve Steps, terms like sin,

"In my work as an addiction counselor over thirty years, I've come to appreciate the spiritual component more and more."

of our sins to the "sunlight of the spirit" described in recovery literature or in the New Testament? There is a better alternative. "If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of His son Jesus cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

THE THREE-FOLD NATURE OF ADDICTION

Of course, there is more to addictive disorders than the spiritual dimension. I learned an important lesson about this as a young counselor, when I had the privilege of hearing the great Dan Anderson, Ph.D., give a lecture on the subject. He was President of Hazelden and a legendary psychologist. I remember his enthusiasm on the dais as he filled a large whiteboard with diagrams and bullet points. He emphasized the three-fold nature of addiction:

1. Physical
2. Psychological
3. Spiritual

"We can abstract any one of these for the purpose of study," he said. "But we must always remember that the alcoholic does not experience them as separate. The alcoholic experiences alcoholism."

He was subtly admonishing the researchers and theoreticians who were always trying to reduce the problem to one key element, in order to produce a unified theory. Dan's point was holistic and complex, avoiding the temptation of over-simplification.

He went on to delineate the goals of treatment.

"One: to break through the patient's denial at depth. Two: to get the patient to commit to a long term program of recovery."

The first point is largely psychological, but the second point is spiritual. We alcoholics need the help of others on a long-term basis to remain sober and to be contented in our sobriety. There are not enough professionals in the world—nor the money to pay them—to rival the care provided free of charge by the community of recovering people.

In my work as an addiction counselor over thirty years, I've come to appreciate the spiritual component more and more. There has been tremendous work done on the physical aspects of addiction (genetic, epigenetic, neurobiological, etc.), and on the emotional and psychological aspects (understanding co-occurring disorders, trauma, attachment theory); but the spiritual component seems to be the glue that holds it all together. The reason is that, ultimately, the patient must manage their own recovery, and the spiritual component provides the most reliable fuel for that journey.

Addiction, like diabetes and many chronic illnesses, cannot be managed professionally. They can be medically monitored, and suggestions given, but hourly and daily management of the chronic condition must be done by the patient. If the patient is still playing God, which is the norm for a person suffering from a substance use disorder, their chances are slim until they can identify a new higher power.

There are various aspects to religious conversion, and how they unfold and express themselves





over days, months, and years can be anything but straightforward. We might study the various elements of metanoia and conversion, but in some regard they are always just out of reach.

The most celebrated conversion story in the New Testament is the transformation of Saul to Paul. His encounter with Jesus isn't preceded by repentance, nor is he seeking help. He believes he is acting righteously in the service of the God of Moses, and his pride is formidable. It's no surprise that Jesus literally knocks him off his high horse.

Saul quickly comes to repent his persecution of Jesus' followers, but he is not ready to take on the full persona of Paul, as we will come to know him in Acts and through his letters, for quite some time. His faith in Jesus is all but immediate (it could hardly be otherwise), but it takes time to gel, and he must

begin under the tutelage of others, experiencing some false starts and time in the desert. He was not an overnight sensation with other Christians.

Most alcoholics don't have a thunderbolt moment where everything changes and the power of God is revealed. Most change gradually, first coming to meetings, then thinking more clearly, and finally rekindling their faith.

TWELVE STEPS: A RECIPE FOR RECOVERY AND CONVERSION

The Twelve Steps offer a simple recipe for recovery—or conversion—that anyone can follow. Here is an overview of the process that leads to a change of heart that will “produce fruit in keeping with metanoia.” (Mt. 3:8)

Step One: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable.”

This step is focused on humility, surrender, and acceptance. It’s difficult because all addicted people hope and believe they will somehow regain control of their addiction. We don’t want to give up our drug of choice; we want to reassert control and escape the consequences. It is magical thinking, and ultimately we collapse under the weight of despair.

Step Two: “Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

Here we find simple advice on how to kindle a flicker of faith when there is none to be found. It does not ask for confession or profession; it barely asks for assent. Indeed the Step turns on the word “could.” It points addicted people toward the light, toward the merest possibility that there could be a power greater than ourselves that could deliver us from soul sickness.

Step Three: “Made a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of God, *as we understood Him.*”

This is a real commitment, but with a loophole big enough to accommodate any faith or none at all. The third Step calls for an interior action which solidifies our commitment to sobriety. Many people bristle at the idea of turning their will over to someone or something else. But the Step asks us to turn it over to the care of God, to make our wills congruent with His. So with every significant action, the question becomes, “What would God have me do?”

Step Four: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

Step Five: “Admitted to God, ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

The concepts of repentance and confession are developed in these steps. Most addicted people have

tremendous difficulty in addressing these Steps thoroughly. Not surprisingly, a failure to do so often results in relapse. Most addicts take several weeks to write out their fourth step inventory, under the guidance of a sponsor. Great emphasis is placed on listing resentments and identifying their underlying causes. In many cases, the causes are found to be “selfishness and fear” — a good description of the human condition.

Step Six: “Became entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.”

Step Seven: “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

These steps also go together, and they constitute a big step forward in the spiritual life. Alcoholics Anonymous is clear in stating “We are not saints... we are only trying to grow along spiritual lines.” After completing Steps Four and Five, there are usually serious character defects which have been uncovered, and Six and Seven provide a method for addressing them. A method which assumes the grace of God, and its ability to work miracles in the human heart. We find that God will indeed remove these defects of character, but this miracle—and the ongoing miracle of recovery itself— is “contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.”

Step Eight: “Made a list of all people we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”

Step Nine: “Made direct amends wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

Repentance means nothing without action, and in the case of addicted people that means making reparation for many years of wrongdoing. Steps Eight and Nine go together to help people right as many wrongs as possible. The program makes little distinction between faith and works. One of the favorite maxims of the early AA’s came from the Epistle of James: “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26)

Step Ten: “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

This step is sometimes referred to as a maintenance step, as it is done on a daily basis. It has some resemblance to the Ignatian Examen. The belief here is that honesty, humility, and action will protect us from backsliding. Real conversion is an ongoing process, and Step Ten is a compact commandment for staying on course.

Step Eleven: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.”

The Step presupposes a number of things: 1) we need to improve our conscious contact with God, 2) that God is accessible through prayer and meditation,

3) that He will guide us, 4) that He will provide the power to do what needs to be done. We are always falling short, and God will always lift us back up again. If we will let him. Usually through the agency of other people.

Step Twelve: “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

Step Twelve introduces the essential element of the Steps: the concept of service to others. This is not mere altruism, but *sine qua non* of recovery. For the early AAs, the admonition of St. James said it all: “Faith without works is dead.” After his profound spiritual awakening, Bill Wilson, co-founder of AA, discovered that he had to work actively with other alcoholics in order to maintain his own sobriety.

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"What was missing? The combination of faith and works. Real metanoia should result in a change so profound it can be seen by others. How better to see it than in selfless service to others?"

Carrying the message was a necessary part of the recovery process. It made no difference whether the prospect stayed sober or not, the act of selfless service was critical to his sobriety.

Dr. Bob Smith, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, talked about the reason he had not been able to stay sober until he met Bill. Dr. Bob had been praying for deliverance, and he was also attending Oxford Group meetings in Akron, Ohio as Bill had done in New York. However, Dr. Bob stated: Bill had "acquired the idea of service. I had not." Carrying the message to other alcoholics helped Dr. Bob stay sober, and millions of other people after him. "You have to give it away to keep it."

Yet people can and do relapse; and here the experience of recovery and religion come even closer.

OVERCOMING AND PREVENTING RELAPSE

Years ago, when I was working as a counselor in an inpatient treatment center, one of my responsibilities was running a Relapse Prevention group for recidivist patients. Most of the men blamed their relapses on external factors: job pressures, break-ups, financial problems, an unexpected death, and so on. However, these are normal hardships in life, and they do not cause relapse in most people. What was the core issue? In most cases, it was a spiritual matter.

Most of the men followed a familiar pattern on the way to relapse, whether the process took days or weeks to culminate in a drink. After having been sober for some period of time, they had: 1) cut down on their Twelve Step meetings, 2) spent less time talking to their sponsor, 3) stopped going to meetings, 4) stopped talking with any group members, 5) relapsed.

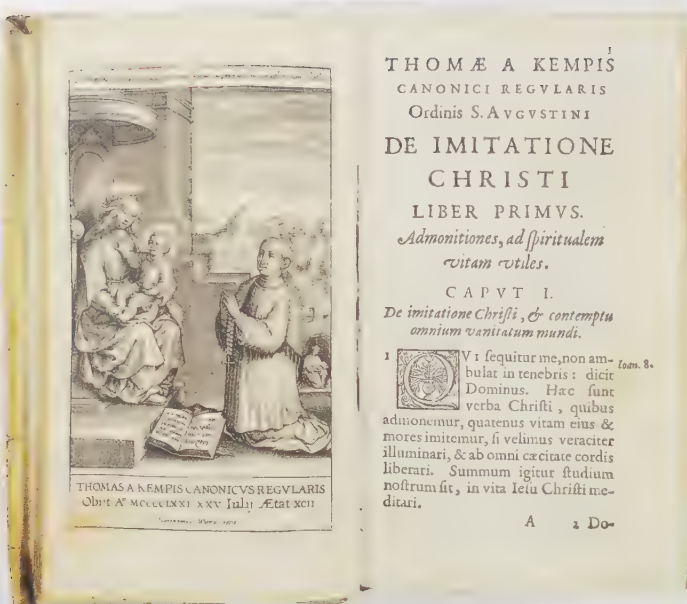
Yet underneath these externals was a more relevant spiritual factor. When I asked them about their prayer life, a great commonality emerged. While they were in active recovery, some had prayed to the God of their understanding, some prayed haphazardly in tandem with the literature of recovery, some prayed only at the beginning or end of Twelve Step meetings, along with the other group members (typically the Serenity Prayer at the beginning and the Lord's Prayer at the end). All had begun to have at least a semblance of a spiritual practice. But before their relapse process began, the spiritual spark had begun to fade. They had relaxed their spiritual discipline, and this had preceded the relapse.

Yet it is too simplistic to say that prayer alone governed their sobriety or relapse. The Twelve Steps are a program of faith in action, with the emphasis on action. Prayer and religious practices by themselves were tried for many centuries as an antidote for addiction, but with scant success. What was missing?

The combination of faith and works. Real metanoia should result in a change so profound it can be seen by others. How better to see it than in selfless service to others?

Besides a cooling off in the spiritual life, there is a well-known path by which addiction reasserts itself in the mind of the addict. Perhaps the most concise description of mental relapse was written six hundred years ago by Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*. Though he was writing about temptation and sin, his explanation is still clinically astute.

"This is how temptation is: first we have a thought, followed by strong imaginings, then the pleasure



and evil emotions, and finally consent. This is how the enemy gains full admittance, because he was not resisted at the outset.” The Imitation of Christ, Book 1, Ch. 13

“First we have a thought...” We welcome it in, make it feel comfortable, and spend time with it. To coin a phrase: we entertain the thought.

“...followed by strong imaginings...” We are now in league with the temptation, actively increasing its allure. The danger is escalating, and because our prayer life has cooled, we are less likely to call out for help, either to God or to our friends. We are left to our own devices, and the old isolation.

“...then the pleasure and the evil emotions...” We are now enjoying the seduction, magnifying its power, and succumbing to the fantasy we are entertaining. We are powerless to resist, though we know the consequences may be dire. We are enthralled by the prospect.

“...and finally consent.”

In the same chapter, Thomas also gives an exquisite solution to temptation, which parallels the value of Twelve Step groups. His brilliant and compact prose lifts the spirit.

“When you are tempted, seek the advice of a wise counselor, and do not yourself be harsh with persons who are tempted; rather be happy to console them as you yourself would wish to be consoled.”

Where better to find a wise counselor than the local Twelve Step meeting? Where better to find someone who might need to be consoled? Where better to find the opportunity for service and support? We recovering people keep going to meetings for many reasons, but most often it is simply to give and receive the kindness that was given to us from the outset. We also find that our greatest defect and liability has become our greatest asset and qualification, because we can share our experience, strength and hope with the newcomer.

I have often seen the eyes of a shaky subject light up as they recognized a fellow traveler. I have been privileged to see the rebirth of hope and the slow, steady development of faith. Interestingly, twelve-steppers have figured out how to do this without hewing one religious tradition. I have personally witnessed meetings attended by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and agnostics without any acrimony passing between them. The grace of God is sufficient.

There is a powerful connection between addiction recovery and religious conversion. The parallels between the basic texts of Twelve Step literature, on the one hand, and the Scriptures and spiritual masterpieces of our traditions, on the other, are everywhere. The recovery movement is a direct offspring of Christian conversion, putting faith in action to overcome addiction.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Jeff Jay emphasizes the three-fold nature of addiction and therefore, the three-fold nature of healing – physical, psychological and spiritual. These three overlap and complement each other. Think of instances in your own life or ministry when one of these three was over-emphasized or perhaps not even acknowledged: did healing/recovery happen? Did it last? Do you see why the “spiritual” is not just an “additional” optional layer of healing nor can it be the sole or primary mode of healing?
2. Recovery and conversion have many things in common, among them are a need to admit our need for God/higher power, confessing our limitations and failures to another person, and enjoying the support of a wise counselor or group. All of us have some chronic addictions and all of us need daily conversion from our own ego. Where are you personally at this time in your life with some form of recovery and conversion?
3. Jeff Jay specifically speaks about the problem of relapse in addiction therapy. Do you see that happen also in the spiritual life? Is our faith conversion sometimes only partial or surface-deep? How might I strive to be a “thoroughly renewed person?”
4. The author quotes Dr. Bob Smith, co-founder of AA, and his own journey of conversion wherein he came to realize “You have to give it away to keep it,” that is, recovery or conversion are not complete unless/ until we share our story and serve others. How does that quotation resonate with your own life story of conversion and renewal?




ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Jay is the author of *Navigating Grace*, a solo voyage of survival and redemption, and *Love First: a family's guide to intervention* (with Debra Jay). He is a clinical interventionist in private practice.



IN PURSUIT OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Susan Muto, PhD

A photograph of a person in a wheelchair, seen from the side, moving along a dirt path. The person is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt. The background is a soft-focus landscape with green trees and a light-colored path. The image is partially obscured by a blue text box on the right side.

In our pursuit of spiritual maturity, we must beware not to mistake “baby steps” for “end stages.” We tend to rely too much on “signs and wonders,” and to disavow the truth taught by the spiritual masters that in aridity the Lord is often most near and that in his apparent silence he speaks. So cluttered is our interiority that we fail to hear what he says.

Another complication we experience in the spiritual journey is our addiction to instant beverages, quick, one-step microwaveable meals, and answers to every question with the speed of an internet search. This “grab-and-go” mentality makes it doubly difficult for us to submit ourselves to the slow and often painful process of cleansing our interiority. Purgation demands that we try our best to avoid slipping into a superficial “cafeteria style” of spirituality, nibbling here and there on this or that fad but never pausing to enjoy the gourmet food of faith deepening and awe-filled abiding with the Lord.

Such quieting is not a luxury but a necessity. Superficial collections of “spiritual vignettes” can never satisfy our longing to taste and savor the “solid food” of silence, spiritual reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. In my research for the classics course I teach at the Epiphany Academy of Formative Spirituality, I came upon an essay by St. Bonaventure entitled “The Six Wings of the Seraph.” (The Works of Bonaventure, Volume III, trans. José de Vinck Patterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1966, 133-196) He explains how to clear the debris of spiritual complacency from our interiority by detailing six dispositions of the interior life necessary for moving from lukewarm Christian living to genuine spiritual transformation:

1. Zeal
2. Compassion or Fraternal Love
3. Patience
4. Virtuous Living or Good Example
5. Discretion or Good Judgment
6. Devotion to God

BEING ZEALOUS

On the lowest level of zeal for righteousness, one finds those who do no evil yet do not devote themselves with particular sincerity to doing good; they strive to be socially acceptable but are careful not to disturb the status quo. Next in line are those who refrain from evil and devote themselves to the performance of the good deeds required of them but no more than that. There is in them no burning desire for holiness. They are content with a minimum of prayer, seeking stillness, if at all, more as a duty than as a joy. Above them are those who detest wrongdoing. They pray fervently and desire to

acquire a more intimate knowledge of God, yet they tend to hold themselves in reserve, with the intent of preserving their own peace at any price. Beyond these rather self-centered orientations, Bonaventure describes those on fire with zeal for holiness and the salvation of souls. They avoid wrongdoing and practice virtue; they receive little comfort from their own progress unless it also leads others to God.

BEING COMPASSIONATE

Compassion for brothers and sisters suffering ailments of the spirit, of the mind, and of the body wells up because one recognizes in others one's own spiritual, mental, and physical vulnerability. Whether one is physically enfeebled or spiritually weak due to lapses in morality, other-centered, egoless care and concern must prevail in imitation of Christ, who said, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Mt 9:12-13).

BEING PATIENT

Responsibility for the bodily and spiritual welfare of others cannot be accomplished in a rush. Patience is necessary in any kind of ministry since instant results are seldom, if ever, forthcoming. When one's ego has been quieted by contemplative prayer, one is able to address others more modestly, maturely, and kindly. Impetuous actions are avoided in favor of peacemaking. Replacing vengeance is the effort to heal those responsible for perpetrating the offense. The holiness of such humble souls increases because of the good they do and the evil they suffer, at times unjustly, through no fault of their own.

“Responsibility for the bodily and spiritual welfare of others cannot be accomplished in a rush... instant results are seldom, if ever, forthcoming.”

BEING VIRTUOUS

To be an exemplar of virtuous living is to match the teaching one receives from Scripture to the deeds that flow from it. As St. Bonaventure reminds us, if the shepherd deserts the flock, he exposes the sheep to the wolves. Those who feel called to lead others to the Lord never act whimsically. They conduct themselves with honesty, candor, courage, and cautious deliberation. They do not indulge in sarcastic humor. They are affectionate but not overly so. They do not play favorites or arbitrarily change their plans. In short, they exercise good judgment and maximum discretion. They try to form those in their charge according to the pattern of Christ, leading them to imitate the Lord in all that they say and do.

BEING DISCRETE

In this way, they strive to become masters in the art and discipline of good judgment or discretion. An area of discernment that requires special attention is ascertaining if one's life mirrors one's knowledge of God's Word. Other goals include: taking care of business and administrative matters while providing for one's own and others' spiritual needs and finding a middle way between strictness and laxity.

BEING DEVOTED TO GOD

Devotion to God gives one the strength to persevere to such a degree that, according to St. Bonaventure, demons flee from us and angels become our companions. To be avoided at all costs is mere "devotionalism" and the false guilt a "holier than thou" attitude evokes. He concludes by reminding us that prayer is the portal to finding and following God's divinely detailed plan for our life.

On the sea of change that challenges the navigational skills of anyone in pursuit of spiritual maturity, St. Bonaventure's advice is well founded. We need to ask God to restore in us fervent zeal; compassion for others; patience in adversity; good example to encourage everyone to grow spiritually; prudence



in regard to daily decisions and actions; and devout thanks to and praise of the Lord. St. Bonaventure realistically concludes: "Not everyone in charge of souls can have all these virtues with equal perfection: all, however, must have them at least to some degree, in order both to edify their subjects and to promote their own salvation."

DETECTING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Turning from this medieval wisdom to a modern master, the German philosopher, Romano Guardini, we hear reiterated the truth that trusting in Divine Providence is inseparable from maturing in Christ. Day by day, we discover in faith a someone behind every something that occurs on our journey. Guardini writes:

There is something more to be said: when we confine ourselves unreservedly to God's guidance, our vision gradually clears. We see how things go in life, how an apparent chance happening may bring an unexpected solution, a painful loss turn out to be a "blessing in disguise." We begin to suspect a hidden connection in the apparent confusion of daily events, and learn to trust in it. One is reminded of the old, hand-woven rug. On the reverse side it presents a confusion of lines; only here and there is the pattern discernible. Turn it over, and the whole pattern is clear. So a man whose

sight is sharpened by the union of his will with God's will gradually detects lines of meaning and purpose running through life. But the pattern appears only in stretches, never in the whole design. However, the stretches grow longer, and the connections between the parts clearer—until, at that last moment, at the final judgment, God's guidance will stand out clearly, and the great providential design revealed in all its creative power. ("Providence" in *The Faith and Modern Man*, trans. Charlotte E. Forsyth [New York: Pantheon Books, 1952], Chapter V:65.)

Guardini echoes the scriptural truth that not a hair falls from our heads without its being known by our heavenly Father (see Luke 12:22-31). He reminds us that we are inclined to impose finite limits on the infinite power of God. We may think that the immensity and complexity of the universe renders such providential care impossible, but who are we to come to such a conclusion? The sun shines on the vineyards and ripens the grapes as if the sun had nothing better to do. In the same way, God's love shines in every corner of the cosmos and especially within the human heart. Rather than try to master the mystery, we ought to rest in peace and let the mystery master us.

SELF-ABANDONMENT TO THE MYSTERY

Trust in the providence of God gives new meaning to times of pain and suffering. What we once saw as only a curtailing of our freedom becomes a reason to accept the future in hope. Our outlook does not represent an escape from reality but an attunement to the saving mystery that holds us in being, whole or broken though we may be. When we are at our worst, we sense that now is the time to let go of logical analysis and abandon ourselves to love divine, all loves excelling. As Guardini says:

All this shows that providence is directed towards the future. Here, now, on earth, in what happens in our own lives and in the course of history, its operation is veiled. Not until the Day

of Judgment will it stand forth fully revealed. By its nature, therefore, it is eschatological. It refers to the birth of the "new creation," a process taking place within the old creation which had been ruined by man's sin. Therefore, not knowledge, but faith, not certainty, but hope are in order. Faith and hope, however, are not less, but more important than knowledge and certainty. But "more" in a sense which, as yet, has not found full expression, and which, as a rule, can be realized only tentatively. (Guardini, p. 66)

God cannot compel this act of trust; it is ours to resist or respond to, but once it is made, its healing effects are lasting. Through trial and error, sin and forgiveness, setbacks and new starts, such trust quiets our fears and illumines our understanding of the significance of every event we experience. All the forces that have formed our life so far—beauty and ugliness, joy and sorrow, laughter and sadness—unfold under the loving gaze of God. What will our response be? To treat every burden as a blessing in disguise or to use it as an excuse to become bitter?

The readiness to accept as providential whatever God sends our way and to see in every obstacle a formation opportunity purges the illusion that we can subject life at will to our preferred agenda. There is truth in the fact that "bad things happen to good people," but it proves terribly harmful to fall into the trap of believing that life is a useless passion or that God rains suffering arbitrarily upon the innocent. All such negative thoughts are cast out the more we trust in the providence of God.

The fruits of this inner cleansing may not be immediately forthcoming. The temptation to distrust the Mystery may persist for a while, but every time we choose to trust, we deepen our grasp of what the Apostle Paul meant when he proclaimed: "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me...I will not treat God's gracious gift as pointless." (Galatians 2:20-21).

THE READER MAY ALSO WISH TO CONSULT:

Robert Cardinal Sarah, with Nicolas Diat, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017).

Susan Annette Muto, *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1994).

Philip O'Mara, *The Character of a Christian Leader* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Building on insights from St. Bonaventure, Dr. Muto describes six dispositions necessary for a conversion from lukewarm faith to genuine spiritual transformation. Which of the six dispositions or virtues do you believe you could better inculcate in your spiritual life? Or to put it another way, where might you be at a spiritual plateau at present and need a new impetus for growth, renewal or conversion?
2. Dr. Muto also suggests that most of us could grow spiritually by a deeper understanding of Divine Providence – that is, trusting that behind or beneath every event of our lives there is someone guiding our journey. Do you have peaceful confidence in God's guiding presence regarding every aspect of your life? Can you also believe in God's Providence at work in ecclesial and world events?
3. Dr. Muto further explains that trust in providence is a day-by-day acceptance that we are a part of a mystery; we do not stand "outside" but are sharing intimately in the unfolding of God's love. Do I see that "partnership" with God at work in my daily life? Do I also see the other relationships in my life as a partnership in the mystery of God's providential care?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SUSAN MUTO, PHD

Executive Director of the Epiphany Association, Susan is a renowned speaker, author, and teacher. A single lay woman living her vocation in the world and doing full-time church ministry, she has led conferences, seminars, and workshops throughout the world. She is the recipient of the 2014 Aggiornamento Award presented by the Parish and Community Library Services Section of the Catholic Library Association in recognition of an outstanding contribution made by an individual or an organization to the ministry of renewal modeled by Pope John XXIII (1881 - 1963).



TERRIBLE DAILINESS

Conversion in Slow Motion

Ben Harrison, MC

Homeless, Acrylic Paint
By Lisa M. Rasmussen

"Terrible dailiness." I came across that phrase years ago in a book on addiction and recovery. I found it an apt description of the fact that many of life's difficulties and diseases, including addictions, can be treated or managed only one-day-at-a-time. As much as we would like to find a lasting cure or reach a state of stable well-being and long-term equilibrium, actual circumstances force us to manage on a provisional, day-to-day basis.

Certainly many readers of this journal have some association with AA, NA and other recovery fellowships; other readers undoubtedly follow other spiritual paths and programs of healing or personal growth. I will rely here on my experience of twelve-step recovery as a general paradigm for the process of conversion most people go through in their search for deeper integrity and fuller humanity.

SURVIVAL

In a recent bout of ill-health this real-life, day-at-a-time approach was the only way I could navigate each day's fresh onslaught of misery. With reduced energy levels and a changing array of symptoms, I had to adapt, painfully and experimentally, to each day's new struggle. Some days, between physical exhaustion and spiritual depletion, I wondered if I'd make it.

In some ways, though, it was refreshing to go back to this basic survival attitude that I have had to resort to in other crisis moments and transition times of my life. Perhaps this is the default approach for our species that takes us back to our primitive anthropological roots, surviving as hunter-gatherers dependent on the seasonal fluctuations of weather, fruit-ripening and game migration, but also subject to all kinds of unforeseen attacks, harsh conditions and natural disasters. Whatever and whenever Eden was, there was most assuredly a very long haul between Eden and the emergence of agricultural and then urban culture.

In the weeks after my mother's death, when I was eleven, I didn't know how I could survive the visceral bruising of loss; I had to manage from one day to the next. In my late teens, I was such a burden to myself that I couldn't imagine living to the age of twenty. In my first days as a recruit in the Army, I thought the hostility and indifference of the system would squeeze me to the point of flesh-burst. And in a time of conflicting loyalties, I found myself imagining myself impaled on wooden spikes, or my head

thrust under the wheels of a passing freight-train. In retrospect, I don't think these were suicidal thoughts so much as mental images of how I felt within myself. And the only way I could manage to carry on was to console myself that this day would surely end, that the next one might be different, and that one day, maybe soon, would be my last.

In one period of my youth lasting a couple of years, I tried living according to the radical approach Jesus espoused in Matthew 6:34: "Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself." It wasn't so much that I was religious or idealistic. I was simply lost. I had unexpectedly survived till my mid-twenties. I had no destination and no ambition. I was treading water, so to speak, and had no idea what I was supposed to do next. And so I imitated the example of the hobos and hippies, the mendicant monks of medieval times, the prospectors and cowboys of the Wild West, and took life as a journey one day at a time. I joined that whole battalion of lost souls and searchers that wandered down the centuries, over deserts, plains and seas, of whom the Buddha and Jesus and their followers were the more enlightened examples.

Because I didn't know what to live for, I took risks casually and carelessly. I would lie down in all kinds of dangerous situations, under bridges, in parks, out in a sandy patch of desert, and before falling to sleep, I would consider the possibility that I might be attacked by bears, a rattlesnake might crawl into my sleeping bag, or a drunken thug might crack me over the head with a bottle – and, even though I wasn't a man of prayer at that time, I had the attitude of

"I was simply lost...I had no destination and no ambition. I was treading water, so to speak, and had no idea what I was supposed to do next."



powerless but peaceful surrender that I picked up as a child when my mother taught me that little prayer: “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.”

As painful as life was, I somehow had the faith that it would end in some form of sweet oblivion, whether tonight or at some future date. This awareness that death is always close by, this “*memento mori*”, thus gave me a sense of balance, at least a modicum of gratitude that I could probably survive again this time, as I had survived many hundreds of times before, the “little death” of sleep, or of an attempted escape achieved by drink, drugs or some other exhausting surfeit of hyper-consciousness.

DESPERATION

In twelve-step fellowships you often hear people speak of the gift of desperation. For me that means

not a sense of despair but a sense that there may be one last glimmer of a possibility of an escape before the axe falls, the floor collapses, or the roof caves in. Desperation is the last exit before despair. And if you are in a state of desperation and a door opens or a path is revealed or a hand is held out, you take it. That is the ‘rock-bottom’ moment, the moment of decision. Sometimes the urgency is such that the decision is made before you are even aware of the option! In my case it started with an unprovoked attack by an unknown assailant that convinced me it was time to get off the streets.

We often hear that the safest way to keep one’s sobriety (or whatever word is used in your fellowship-of-choice) is to remember where you came from – as vividly as possible, with all the attendant shades of dinginess, whiffs of rot, shivers of withdrawal, and gut-wrenching terror, alongside the fact that you are somehow, amazingly, not in that place now. I sometimes share the following



suggestion with people in early recovery. Perhaps it is too heady a tippie for new-comers, and usually my words are met with a look of incomprehension or, at best, confusion. But my recommendation is this, that once in a while, not too often because it is a scary limb to climb out on, you pray that your Higher Power will keep you as desperate as you need to be so that you will keep working your program.

A daily dose of desperation is perhaps just the antidote needed for the chronic reality-awareness deficiency that is at the root of most of our spiritual problems. Mental and spiritual well-being is living in the truth, the truth of how the world really is, how human beings really are, and how God relates to both. The truth is that we are small creatures, mortals, sinners capable of all kinds of accidents, follies and indiscretions. The truth is also that being little and lost, we need help. And the truth is that there is help available, both from fellow creatures and the Creator.

CONVERSION

Now, you may be asking yourself, what does any of this have to do with conversion? I think it has everything to do with conversion. As the monks love to remind themselves and others, one of the vows of St. Benedict's rule is *conversatio morum*, and that means on-going conversion. In the chaplaincy office of the prison where I work, as I was getting ready to go out on the wings one day, I made a crack that one hears often among Catholic religious, "Okay, guys. I'm off. Pray for my conversion!" There was an instant look of surprise and alarm on the faces of the Pentecostal and Muslim chaplains, wondering what game I was playing, until I explained that in our understanding, conversion is on-going and rarely completed this side of the grave. There may (or may not be) a dramatic moment - St. Paul being struck blind or St. Anthony the Abbot hearing the Gospel or St. Francis stripping naked - but even such a moment is only the beginning of a process that

requires many thousands more steps than the twelve that so succinctly summarize that journey of spiritual discovery.

True, conversion is based on belief, on an experience of the Holy, the Absolute, the Ultimate. And conversion often begins with a radical change in the way one sees the world, the meaning one finds. As Gerard Manley Hopkins has it, conversion can fall suddenly like Paul's or advance slowly like Augustine's:

Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,
Or as Austin, a lingering-out sweet skill,
Make mercy in all of us ...
(Wreck of the Deutschland, part I)

But even St. Paul, as an example of quick conversion, needed his time in Arabia and Damascus before he started preaching, and remained sharply aware of his weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:10) and reluctant to claim certainty of anything except God's mercy in Christ (Phil 3:13; Gal 6:14; 2 Cor 1:9).

However, being the complicated creatures we are, we can't change everything about ourselves all at once. We are like a rocky piece of ground in which winter's freezes bring new rocks to the surface, and spring's digging has to lever them out, along with assorted roots and clods and other junk. And some of those rocks are too big to budge that first year. We may have to wait a year or several for them to break into manageable pieces.

With an anvil-ding
And with fire in him forge thy will
Or rather, rather then, stealing as Spring
Through him, melt him but master him still.
(Wreck of the Deutschland, part I)

ACCEPTANCE

My experience of this process is that the changes of my conversion come in a cyclic succession. Some issue is constantly bugging me, some conflict keeps recurring, or some obsession plagues me until I finally give it my full attention. Usually it is something about myself, humanity or the real world that I need to accept in a more radical way. And often I find myself unwilling or unable to take that step.

I may try to forget it or ignore it, but it keeps pestering and festering until I say, "Okay, I know you're there. I know you're not going to go away. I don't like the looks of you and I don't really want you in my life. I'm powerless either to get rid of you or to accept you, but I will pray for the grace to accept you anyway. God help me, God give me the grace to accept this...., or at least be willing to accept it. Or give me the grace to give you permission to do the accepting in me, despite me and on my behalf!"

The acceptance may not come at once, but it usually comes fairly soon. And then I see that whatever it was that I resisted so strenuously, like an unwanted child, has a right to be there. In fact, that which I resisted actually has a necessary part to play in the unfolding drama of my integration. Sometimes I even manage to love that part of myself or my world that embarrasses or unsettles me so much. And if I can get to the point that I'm able to give that kid a little hug and kiss her on the top of her head, she's quite likely to run off and play quietly in the back yard with all my other previously exorcised imps.

And then I have a little breather, a time to regroup and to feel some gratitude for that extra bit of freedom I have acquired by accepting the unacceptable. And then the next issue comes along, the next rock rises to the surface, the next problem child starts hanging around the kitchen, looking hungry.

But the question arises, if acceptance in general and self-acceptance in particular are so important for conversion, is there anything that we really must not accept, anything that really is unacceptable, cannot or must not be accepted? First, it is important to remind ourselves that acceptance doesn't mean capitulation. I have to accept the fact that there is a problem, or let us say, an issue, before I can find ways to address the matter. Acceptance is not necessarily surrender.

Accepting the fact that I have cancer doesn't mean that I accept the cancer itself and wish it success and prosperity in its attempts to destroy my organs. In fact, refusing to accept that I have cancer, or pretending that it's not there, serves only to postpone whatever treatment would be most effective. Once I accept that I have the problem, that I have a physical illness, a psychological conflict, an addiction, a disability, then and only then can I begin to think of the proper way to deal with the situation in a way that I discern, with prayer and counsel, will help me live most fully.

Of course, there may be some cases in which nothing can be done, at least concretely, but even then

"Once I accept that I have the problem, that I have a physical illness, a psychological conflict, an addiction, a disability, then and only then can I begin to think of the proper way to deal with the situation..."

acceptance does not necessarily mean surrender unless one decides that is the best way. As Dylan Thomas says, we do not need to “go gentle into that good night.” We can decide, if we want, to “rage against the dying of the light.” Jesus had His cry of anguished abandonment from the cross before he could entrust his soul into his Father’s hands.

AMPUTATION AND AMBIGUITY

But, are there things in us that must simply be amputated, crucified, rejected, excised? Both Jesus and St. Paul seem to say as much. In Matthew 5:29, 30, Jesus gives us the terrifying warning that if our eye or our hand causes us to sin, we should cut it off. And Paul often speaks, as in Galatians 5:24, of crucifying “the flesh with its passions and desires,” and urges us to “kill everything in you that belongs only to earthly life” (Col. 3:5).

But if we have to amputate whatever causes us to sin, then the question remains, what exactly does cause us to sin? It is certainly not my hand, nor even my eye. And even though the mind and the heart are sometimes spoken of as the source of evil desires, they do not cause my sin. What causes me to sin are decisions I make (or fail to make) based on the lies, the false beliefs, the illusions to which I cling - my grandiosity, my fears, my habits of thought, my chaotic reactions to emotions. If sin is ultimately based on my choice, my decision, then it is a question of will. And God surely does not want me to kill my will – to surrender it and let it be changed, of course, but not to crucify it. For the will is also the source of my decision to turn from my old ways and embrace the new way offered by the Spirit. My will is the ‘organ’ by which I am able to love God, neighbour, and self.

As I struggle with all that, as I have struggled with all that over many years, I have reached the conviction that I am not always the one who can judge what needs chopping. Once we have cleared



away the obvious serious issues or ‘mortal sins’ in our inventory, those actions and habits that are clearly destroying us and making life painful for others, we are left with a lot of traits with ambiguous value.

Often when I conclude that I must get rid of some humiliating habit or behaviour, friends tell me that that is one of the gifts and blessings I bring to others. My sponsor or spiritual director or friends may be able to help me see what I need to repudiate entirely, but there is much that even they don’t have the objectivity, the wisdom or the perspective to judge. And even if we all agree that some particular habit or behaviour needs to go, we find ourselves utterly powerless to stop it, drop it or chop it. There is much that I have to leave to time, to the daily unfolding of my journey, in the presence of the one who is my companion, but also the source of healing, the one who can perform the surgery when and where it is needed, or administer the right medicine.

There were three of us chatting over coffee at a recovery convention. A friend of Rick’s had brought him to a meeting a couple of months before, and he had now amassed a week free of crack cocaine. He felt grateful and free and wanting more of this

wonderful new life, but proudly proclaimed he didn't believe in steps and sponsors. The third guy, Frank, argued the traditional view and espoused the necessity of the 12 steps. With mischievous intent I said, "Frank, you won't convince him. Rick is a rebel and proud of it." Rick grinned, pleased. But then came a flash of insight as I mused, "We addicts think we're such great rebels, always doing our own thing, thinking totally outside society's box. But the fact is, we addicts are slaves. The rebel is that little guy inside us that wants freedom, real freedom. That's the one who's waiting patiently for the opportunity to open the door to recovery and do whatever it takes to get free and stay free."

And I thought of Rahab at Jericho (Joshua 2:1-3; 6:17-25). Was she a traitor or a hero - or just a survivor? And I thought of my own story and many that I've heard. Addiction is like a tyrant who has usurped control of a walled city. He bends everything to his own purposes. But there is always, in every fortress, firm, institution or enterprise, a dissatisfied maid servant, errand boy, secretary or janitor who, given the chance, will toss a key over the wall or leave the postern gate open; let the draw-bridge down or disconnect the security cameras. The rebel is the one who wants freedom. The rebel saves the day. The rebel "acts against" ingrained habits. The rebel works a program, methodically and stubbornly digging his escape tunnel with the teaspoon of terrible dailiness. Rebelliousness, then, is it a defect or a saving grace?

SURPRISES

It was only the drudgery of the daily grind, under the cold gaze of the slave driver, Habit, that finally

convinced me, or that little rebel in me, that I needed to make some big changes. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that it was against the background of that tedium and drudgery that events befell me that made me realize I needed to try something different. In listening to the stories of hundreds of people, it is clear to me that it is rarely people in the daily circle of the afflicted person who are able to convince him or her to seek help. As Gerald May points out, the ritualized routines of the 'stuck' soul allow for very few surprises. There needs to be some unexpected crisis or warning from an unlikely source that finally opens the chink in the armour that allows the first breath of clean air, or shaft of sunlight, the tiny seed of hope or first tendril of the plant whose growth will eventually breach the foundations and introduce life into the tomb. It is not someone's parents, partner or supervisor who will convince them to seek help. It will more likely be a nurse in an emergency room, a prison officer, a cell-mate, or a stranger on the bus who will say something that will give the desperate little rebel inside the unexpected opportunity to act, to throw a key over the wall or open the gate to hope, recovery, grace.

Similarly, when I have gotten an insight or suggestion that helped me move forward in my process, it was almost never something that emerged from the agitations and cogitations of my own churning mental washer-load of soapy but all-too-familiar rags, but some surprising new angle or strategy proposed by a sponsor, confessor, counsellor or companion on my spiritual journey. It's simple. I need help. As long as I try to stay in control of my life, it will get more and more snarled and snagged.

"There needs to be some unexpected crisis or warning from an unlikely source that finally opens the chink in the armour that allows the first breath of clean air, or shaft of sunlight..."



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DAILINESS

The on-going process of conversion is painfully slow, and each day has its own difficulties and lessons. Some of the conditions which afflict me may require daily doses, whether that be insulin, warfarin or 12-step meetings. There are many blessings in this process, but I suppose the one I appreciate most is freedom. Each step toward a deeper acceptance of myself and my reality brings a greater freedom. I have to learn to let life breathe through me, flow through me, breath by breath, day by day. Life, health, recovery, spirit – are all things that I'll never be able to grab and hold. They are things that are only in us when they're flowing through us – from God and others, to God and others.

Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread. I can't eat enough today to last me for the week or breathe enough air to get me through the hour. I can't stock up enough grace today to get me through the month. Each time that I admit that I need help nourishes me for the onward journey. The word journey itself tells us that our progression toward our goal is measured in days – jours in French, from Latin diurnum. We are journey-men, day-labourers, hired for this day's work, praying only for a knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry it out – today!

One of the refrains we often hear is, "In God's will is my peace." If I believe that God created me for some purpose, kept me alive for some reason, then I will find deep happiness only by fulfilling my purpose, by doing what I was made to do, being who I was made to be. I say to my friends in prison, a screw-driver will not be happy if it's used as a chisel. A Porsche will not serve to deliver cement. The great adventure of life is the journey of discovery – of discovering, day by day, who I am, what I can do, what I have in me, what I can give, and how I can serve.

There is only today. "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!" Yes, there is a terrible dailiness about this journey of conversion and recovery. But as we learn to live in this day, the terrible turns to terrific, and our hearts open to that "dearest freshness deep down things." (Hopkins, God's Grandeur)

PRAYING IN THE PROCESS

God, I thank you for the wonder of my being.

I want to be all yours, but there are, deep within me, areas not yet surrendered to your sway; closets, drawers and hidey-holes whose keys I have hidden or lost.

There are energies and resistances, there are fears and hurts, there is rebellion and wilfulness.

Penetrate deeper, deeper within me.

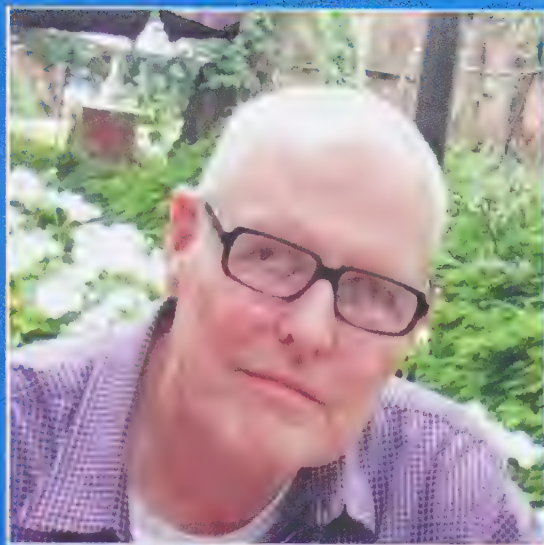
Help me to lovingly accept all that is broken, snarled and cowering in me – even my violence, prejudices, hatred and lust.

Help me to surrender it all to you, so you can love it, bless it and transform it all into whatever you want it to be.

I reject none of it but put it into your care to nurture, heal, remove or change, so that I can be yours fully and freely. Amen

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Father Harrison writes autobiographically of the long, slow, unfolding process of conversion; it seems we are never a “finished” person. Has that been your experience as well? With what type of chronic “slowness” of conversion or change are you struggling with at this time in your life? Can you find some peace and consolation in Fr. Harrison’s humble confession?
2. The author speaks of desperation as a gift because it forces us to a decision; we can no longer tarry. Have you grown closer to God and others as you’ve “hit the wall” of desperation?
3. Father Harrison makes the point that acceptance is not surrender; in fact, acceptance opens the door to new and deeper challenges. Again conversion has many layers. Have you accepted everything about yourself? In what way are you still resisting full acceptance of the “reality” of your gifts and limits?
4. The author asks a tantalizing question: Is “rebelliousness” a defect or perhaps a saving grace? Based on your own experience, how would you answer that question?
5. The author seems to suggest in various ways that the acceptance necessary for conversion must also include a spirit of humble, patient endurance: There’s no “quick fix!” Do you agree that the very nature of conversion is gradual?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Harrison is a Missionaries of Charity Brother currently living and working with his community in Manchester (U.K.), trying to be a friend and companion to street people, prisoners and ex-prisoners, addicts in and not-yet-in recovery, Traveller families, and others “on the edges.” He has also done similar work and held formation roles in Brothers’ communities in Los Angeles and Sicily.

He grew up in the mountains of Virginia, studied literature and history at the University of Maryland, did his military service, and spent a few years searching before finding his way to the M. C. Brothers in Los Angeles in 1977.



OUR STRUGGLE WITH SHAME

Noreen Cannon Au, Ph.D. and Wilkie Au, Ph.D.

"We live in an atmosphere of shame. We are ashamed of everything that is real about us; ashamed of ourselves, of our relatives, of our incomes, of our accents, of our opinions, of our experience, just as we are ashamed of our naked skin." George Bernard Shaw made this observation in 1903 and it still rings true today.

Contemporary psychology views shame as a "silent epidemic," because it can infect every aspect of our life and is at the heart of much of human suffering. Psychologically, shame damages our sense of self and makes us feel worthless and unlovable. Spiritually, it contaminates our relationship with God, infusing it with fear that we are unworthy of God's love. It makes us keep God at arm's length, certain that God will judge us as harshly as we judge ourselves.

Carl Jung called shame "*the swampland of the soul*," after witnessing its corrosive and crippling impact on his patients. The hallmark of shame is a constant awareness of our defects and deficiencies, a vague feeling that "something is wrong with me."

Shame hovers over all our relationships so that much of our life experience is colored by it--anticipating it, experiencing it and/or managing it. Psychologists call it the "master emotion" because it regulates our expression, even our recognition, of all our emotions, including shame itself. As a master emotion, shame is often the real emotion behind other emotions such as anger and hurt. Any emotion that is unacceptable (shameful) will be replaced with a less shameful emotion. For example, if anger is acceptable but hurt is shameful, we will substitute anger when feeling hurt. When all emotions are shameful, we shut down completely so that we don't feel anything.

Although often confused with guilt, shame is a painful feeling of unworthiness and inadequacy. Unlike guilt, which is the feeling of having done something wrong, shame is the feeling of being something wrong. Guilt says, "I made a mistake." Shame says, "I am a mistake." Though many of us use these terms interchangeably, the distinction is important, particularly for spiritual directors and therapists, because many of the problems people struggle with involve shame. Often directees/clients will speak of "feeling guilty" when what they are really feeling is shame, a sense of not being good enough:

- "I feel like I don't measure up to what a good father (or mother or spouse) should be."
- "I'm embarrassed by how little I have to show for my life."
- "I feel stupid and inferior, when I compare myself with the people I work with."
- "I never feel like I live up to what is expected of me."
- "I feel like a fraud."
- "I think I was a disappointment to my parents."
- "If people at church really knew me, they would be shocked by what I really think and feel."

In addition to confusing shame and guilt, people often will speak of feeling "embarrassed" or

"awkward," in order to avoid feeling the pain that the word "shame" evokes. Spiritual directors and therapists may avoid talking about shame if they think it will cause distress and resistance, or they have not dealt with their own shame.

HEALTHY SHAME

As destructive as shame can be, some shame is healthy. For instance, shame that takes the form of modesty helps us to protect our privacy. It helps us to set good boundaries and to respect the boundaries of others. It also helps us to regulate our behavior so that we act appropriately in various situations. Humility is also a form of shame. It is our acceptance of our identity before God-- imperfect, yet good; sinful, yet loved. Pope Francis speaks of shame and humility as two sides of the same coin. "Shame is a Christian virtue, the virtue of humility." It is appropriate, he says, to feel shame when we recognize our weaknesses and failures; but "we must never masquerade before God." The best indication of a healthy relationship with shame is self-acceptance and compassion toward ourselves and others.

THE SOURCES OF SHAME

Shame, like love or fear, is built into our human nature. None of us is immune to it. It is perfectly normal to have moments of feeling bad about ourselves or to fear rejection. Unhealthy shame, however, is not momentary—it is constant, and even worse, toxic. Shame develops early in life and is largely determined by the intertwining of our unique temperament at birth and the shaming experiences we suffer during our formative years. At a young age, we develop a sense of ourselves as worthy or worthless, based on the quality of care we receive. When our needs are adequately met, we internalize a sense of worthiness that grows into healthy self-esteem. When our needs are not adequately met, feelings of unworthiness become an integral part of



our self-image. These early experiences determine, for better or worse, our inner sense of ourselves, as well as our view of the world.

Childhood Deprivation: Early life experiences have lasting effects on a child's emotional and physical health. Young children are totally dependent on their parents for all their needs, and are highly sensitive to the feeling quality of their parents' presence. Having one's physical needs met is vitally important, but in addition, a child needs to feel unconditionally loved in order to develop into a healthy and emotionally secure adult. Unconditional love is shown in the way the parent holds, touches and soothes the infant; it is shown in the loving gaze in the parent's eyes that acts as a mirror in which the infant sees him or herself as precious and worthy; and it is shown in the consistency of care and attention that the infant can count on. When children are deprived of the love and care they need, they feel abandoned and unlovable.

Emotional deprivation in childhood can result from a variety of factors. Parents who were themselves emotionally wounded may be unable to give what they did not get. Depression, serious illness, financial worries, the death of one's spouse, persistent marital strain, or divorce can divert parental attention from the child. Parents can also be incapacitated by alcohol and drug addiction, or by fatigue from overwork. Any of these conditions can overshadow one's childhood, creating an environment that is focused on the needs of the parents instead of the needs of the child. No matter what the cause, when children are deprived of what they need, they blame themselves for being unworthy of their parents' attention and love.

Parental Expectations: When parents' expectations are age-appropriate and based on a child's own unique capabilities, children can feel proud of their accomplishments, because their parents are proud of them. When parents have unrealistic expectations that a child be like someone else—a sibling, perhaps,



or a neighbor's child-- the child who fails to measure up assumes the blame and feels shame.

Child Abuse (Physical, Sexual, Emotional, and Neglect): Child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions, and at all levels of education. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services lists four categories of child abuse: physical, sexual, emotional and neglect. Physical abuse refers to any non-accidental injury to a child, including hitting, kicking, slapping, burning, pinching, hair pulling, biting, choking, shoving, whipping, and paddling. Sexual abuse refers to any sexual act between an adult and a child, including pornography, exhibitionism, or secretly watching children undress or bathe. Emotional abuse refers to anything that is harmful to a child's mental health, such as ignoring, yelling, screaming, name-calling, shaming, or telling children that they are "no good" and "should never have been born." Parents and other adults often use shame as a means of control. Neglect refers to the failure to provide for a child's physical needs,

including lack of supervision, inadequate shelter, food, or water, inappropriate clothing for the weather or season, abandonment, denial of medical care and inadequate hygiene. Child abuse is more common than most of us realize. The belief that abuse only happens in certain kinds of families is a myth.

Sexuality: How we are introduced to human sexuality and our own personal sexual experiences determine how we feel about ourselves as sexual beings. Parents who are uncomfortable or ashamed of their own sexuality may be embarrassed by their child's curiosity about sex and convey the message that sex is bad and should not be talked about.

Race and Gender: Racial minorities in all societies can feel the shame of being different, especially if they are devalued and excluded by members of the dominant race. In parts of the United States, for example, prejudice against Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Muslims and other minority groups still exists and can result in job discrimination, racial profiling, police brutality, and other forms of violence.

Socioeconomic Status: Variables of class, education, and profession are also potential sources of shame. The deepening gap between rich and poor caused by income inequality and unequal access to education creates an ever-widening disparity in people's lifestyles. Poverty, unemployment and homelessness are breeding grounds for shame.

While much of the literature on shame focuses on parental behavior, the influence of siblings, teachers, peers and social institutions also plays a significant role. In addition, it is important to note that a person can have problems with shame even when they had good, loving, attentive parents.

Genetic factors can play a role in how emotionally sensitive we are to the ordinary stresses of growing up. It is not uncommon for children to misinterpret events and situations or to feel that they don't get enough love, appreciation, encouragement and support.

SYMPTOMS OF SHAME

A Russian proverb says, "Shame is worse than death." Shame is one of the most powerful emotions that we feel; it causes people to avoid relationships, gives rise to addictions, breeds depression, perfectionism, co-dependency, and it can even lead to suicide. Shame has been called "the shaper of symptoms," because it can take many forms.

Withdrawal: Avoiding relationships is a classic shame response. Shame makes us want to hide or disappear; withdrawing from relationships protects us from the humiliation and rejection we anticipate if others

get to know us. Not making eye-contact, cancelling plans, avoiding phone calls, pretending to be busy are often signs of shame.

Self-Blame: Shame makes people blame themselves when things go wrong, and apologize for things that are not their fault. A common sign of shame is staying in abusive or manipulative relationships, believing that the abuse is deserved. We tend to gravitate toward those who treat us the way we think we deserve; when we feel good about ourselves we expect to be well-treated. When we feel defective and unlovable, we expect to be mistreated.

Anger and Hostility: Another common symptom of shame is feeling angry and lashing out at others. Blaming others for our deficiencies and shaming them mitigate our shame by replacing it with anger and righteousness.

Addiction: If shame becomes too painful to tolerate, we might seek temporary relief in drugs, food, alcohol, sex, etc. Any of these ways of numbing our feelings, however, can become addictions and cause greater shame, and a vicious cycle.

HEALING THE EFFECTS OF SHAME

Shame is a powerful and destructive emotion that can infect every aspect of our lives. Although most of our shame-inducing experiences happened early in life, we carry their painful effects into adulthood, utilizing various coping strategies to "not feel" it. Thus, the healing of shame begins with becoming conscious of the strategies we use to defend against it. Paying attention to our pretenses—the masks we

"Shame is one of the most powerful emotions that we feel; it causes people to avoid relationships, gives rise to addictions ...can even lead to suicide."



wear and the ways that we try to boost our self-esteem and make others think highly of us—helps us to see how shame manifests itself in our everyday behavior.

Questions such as the following can help us begin to explore our shame and to pinpoint when we are feeling it:

- What experiences can cause me to feel embarrassed or make me fear that I will be rejected or ridiculed?
- When do I feel most vulnerable and ill at ease?
- What feelings and emotions are unacceptable to me?
- When do I feel like disguising who I really am?

Anne Lamott shares, “I will never know how hard it is to be developmentally disabled, but I do know the sorrow of being ordinary and that much of our life is spent doing the crazy mental arithmetic of how, at any given moment, we might improve, or least disguise or present our defects and screw-ups in either more charming or more intimidating ways.”

Healing the harmful effects of shame brings about radical self-acceptance and self-compassion and leads to greater spiritual and emotional health. Spiritually, it clears the debris that is in the way of our relationship with God; if shame makes us keep God at arm’s length because we fear God’s judgment and rejection, we need to identify our images of God that prevent us from experiencing God’s unconditional love. Psychologically, the very act of naming our shame and sharing it with someone we trust makes us feel less ashamed and more compassionate and self-accepting.

The first step in the healing of shame is to recognize that the shame we carry is not our fault. For the most part, it is the result of circumstances beyond our control. Acknowledging this enables us to stop blaming our self and begin caring for the abandoned “inner child,” that part of us that holds all the shameful feelings and painful memories of long ago experiences.

Caring for this part of ourselves can begin by simply bringing it into our prayer and opening ourselves

“Psychologically, the very act of naming our shame and sharing it with someone we trust makes us feel less ashamed and more compassionate and self-accepting.”

to God’s healing touch. The following two prayer exercises, taken from our book and based on the gospel story of the children being brought to Jesus, illustrate this kind of prayer.

JESUS AND THE CHILDREN (MARK 10: 13-16)

1. Find a quiet place, where you can be alone and undisturbed for a period of thirty to forty-five minutes.
2. Say a brief prayer acknowledging the presence of God as you enter into prayer and ask for the grace to be open to the healing touch of God.
Read the text a couple of times slowly, and take in the event that the text is relating. What is happening, and how does the action unfold? Who are the people involved? How do they feel about each other and what is occurring?
3. Put the text away. Now with the eyes of your imagination, see the dramatic action of the story unfold, as if you were witnessing the event as an outside observer.
4. With the eyes of the imagination, see how parents are rushing up to Jesus, bringing their little children for him to touch. Seeing this, the disciples react quickly to stop them because they are concerned that Jesus needs some time alone to rest. But Jesus scolds the disciples for trying to prevent the children from coming close to him.
5. Notice how Jesus reaches out and hugs each of the children. Then he lays his hands on them and blesses

them. Experience how secure and loved each child feels as he or she is being embraced and blessed by Jesus.

6. Now imagine that you are taking your inner child to Jesus so that you too can be touched. Just as you arrive, Jesus is blessing the last of the children gathered about him and the disciples.

You walk up and stand right in front of him. Jesus smiles warmly at you and invites you to sit next to him. You hesitate and slowly move closer. Putting his arm around your shoulders, he encourages you to tell him how you have been hurt. As the compassionate and understanding face of Jesus acknowledges the hurts you have experienced, you feel deeply reassured of your own loveliness.

COMMENTS ON THE EXERCISE

Excessive shame is the result of not feeling loved and embraced in a way that reassures us of our goodness and worth. In addition to being fed and clothed, infants need to experience warm and caring touch in order to know they are loved. Recognizing how important this is to healthy physical and emotional development, hospitals often have “volunteer cuddler programs” in the neonatal intensive care units based on studies showing that infants who are regularly held, soothed and spoken to gain weight faster and leave the hospital sooner than those who are not. If you sense that you were not loved in this



way, praying over this passage and imagining that you are the child being embraced by Jesus can be a powerfully healing experience.

FEAR OF ABANDONMENT AND THE LOVE OF GOD

If we felt abandoned in childhood, either physically or emotionally, we live in fear that it will happen again. When we are deprived of the love we need, we blame ourselves for being unworthy of love and feel shame because we presume it is our fault. If you identify with this experience of early abandonment and neglect, you can continue the prayer exercise of Jesus and the children in the following way:

1. Recall how old you were and how you looked when you felt hurt and alone as a child. Looking at an old photo would be helpful. Imagine yourself as that child sitting on Jesus' lap. Sense how Jesus intuitively feels your discomfort with intimacy and your fear of being rejected and abandoned.

2. Wanting to comfort and reassure you, Jesus tells you of God's love for you. Like a parent soothing a fearful child by reading it a story, Jesus recites the following verses from the prophet Isaiah:

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me,
My Lord has forgotten me.
Can a woman forget her nursing child,
Or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
Your walls are continually before me
(Isa 49: 14-16)

3. Imagine that your shame and fear of abandonment dissipate as you listen to Jesus' gentle reminder of God's faithful love for you.

Ultimately, our self-acceptance is an act of faith in

a God who created us and deemed us to be good. If God loves and cares for us unconditionally, how can we justify withholding that same kind of love and acceptance from ourselves? It is the ultimate in pride to think that our standards for acceptability can be higher than those of God's. If we have suffered from deep feelings of shame all our life, we must be converted from the belief that "I am not good enough" to the belief that "What I am is enough—enough for God's love and enough for my own joyful embrace."

By the time we are adults, we have learned to live around our shame, by-passing it with one or more of the strategies described above. So adept are we at "not feeling" shame, that we may have difficulty recognizing it in ourselves. For most people shame commonly takes the form of an overall sense of low self-esteem; we feel unattractive, inadequate, weak, shy, flawed, stupid, rejected, intimidated or ineffectual. This is the shame we have felt as long as we can remember. Many of us can recall stories when a person or situation left us feeling ashamed and defenseless. Shaming experiences scar our self-image and continue to dog us, even when we know intellectually that it happened years ago. We may try to move past it and forget about it, and to some extent we succeed, but when the memory comes back to us we feel the shame all over again.

An initial step in healing the effects of shame entails recalling shameful experiences and feelings, so that we can bring them into our prayer, the place where God meets us in our pain. The suffering that we have kept out of our prayer (and out of God's reach) we now choose to bring to God, who desires to heal us and make us whole. Transforming the effects of shame is not a solitary process. In therapy and in spiritual direction, it is the experience of being heard, seen, and emotionally held that is healing. Likewise, if prayer is to be healing and transforming, we must be willing to let God in on our hurt by acknowledging our shameful feelings. We cannot heal ourselves by ourselves; we need another to bear



witness to our pain, to truly see us, and to embrace and console us. The following is a way of proceeding that many people have found fruitful:

- It is important to begin to recognize shame in your life. Notice the ways that you shame yourself. “That was stupid. You look terrible today. You’ll never be as smart as... Who cares what you have to say? They don’t really like you.” Now, notice how others are shaming you. “Let me show you the right way.” “I can’t believe you could be so dumb.” “Didn’t you ever learn how to do that?” “You ate all that?” “Don’t you know that coat is out of date?”
- Understand the origins of your shame. When did it begin? How did it start? Recall one of your most shaming experiences as a child. What do you remember? Pay attention to how you felt. How did you deal with it at the time?
- How do you experience and deal with shame now? How do you conceal it? What defenses do you use to avoid feeling shame?

- How do you think shame has affected your relationship with others? With God?
- Now, imagine yourself in a situation that caused you great shame. What do you wish someone had done to help you feel better? What words would have comforted you?
- Imagine Jesus saying those words to you now. Look at Jesus as you listen to his words. Can you take in the compassion in his eyes? Let his words touch your heart. Pay attention to how you feel.
- Practice self-empathy. Imagine treating yourself with the same respect and compassion that you feel from Jesus.
- Practice self-forgiveness. Forgive yourself for the self-blame and self-hatred you thought you deserved.

To enter into this kind of intimate prayer in which we allow our self to be transparent before God, we must trust God enough to expose our vulnerability and pain. The fearful parts of us that hide in secrecy need to be reassured that God will embrace them with loving acceptance. In our book on the healing of shame, we suggest other ways of praying with Gospel stories, in which the compassion of God is manifested in Jesus’ encounters with those struggling with crippling shame. When we savor these scriptural accounts with our imagination, we can gain an affective and heartfelt experience of the good news proclaimed by the Gospel: that we are loved by a God whose love is all-embracing and unconditional. Or, as Greg Boyle, S.J., puts it, “The ‘no matter whatness’ of God dissolves the toxicity of shame and fills us with tender mercy. Favorable, finally, and called by name....”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. The Doctors Au distinguish “shame” from “guilt”: guilt is the feeling from having done something wrong whereas shame says I am a mistake. Do you have feelings of shame? What are you doing with them?
2. How might we help another person overcome excessive, unhealthy shame?
3. The authors note that shame makes us keep God at an arm’s length; we fear His judgment and rejection. Perhaps, then, the “issue” can be our image of God. Part of the “way out” of shame is self-acceptance and believing in His unconditional love: “What I am is enough – enough for God’s love and for my own joyful embrace.” Does shame over some pattern of addiction or apparent failure or rejection black your relationship with God?
4. Do you ever shame yourself by the way you speak about yourself? Do you ever use vocabulary/expressions that “shame” other people?
5. The Doctors Au offer several suggested meditations for healing of shame, particularly shame we have carried from childhood. Spend some time with Mark 10:13-16 or Isaiah 49:14-16.

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MURMURINGS OF A VOYAGER IN VIETNAM

Michael Downey



THE INTIMACY OF SPEECH

Shortly after arriving at Tan Son Nhat Airport in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) to begin teaching at the new Catholic Institute of Vietnam, the first-ever graduate school of theology in that country, I went with Tuan to visit the home of his sister. It is hard to describe the cramped quarters in which she and her husband live. Back in the day in my Irish-Catholic neighborhood in Southwest Philadelphia, a living space this small was said to be "no bigger than a postage stamp."

Chi (Older Sister) Hoa went into the next "room," separated from the living area by a sort of makeshift sheer curtain of glistening beads. From my plastic kiddie chair in the living area I could hear Chi Hoa talking away, barely audibly. It was more like a whisper. She did not pause. Kept talking. Talking to herself? Mumbling? Perhaps she was confiding a secret to someone on her mobile phone? A bit perplexed, I asked Tuan: "Who is Chi Hoa talking to?" His matter-of-fact response: "To me." "What is she saying?" I wondered aloud. "She's telling me that the price of cashews has gone up since last year and she is complaining that they don't taste any better and so she wants to know why they cost more. She says that she has been going to the same shop for cashews for a long time – friends of the family – but she will go to a different shop to buy nuts next year."



Some days later, I went to Tuan's family home for the celebration of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. It is hard for Westerners to imagine the importance of this celebration. There are very few holidays in Vietnam. Some celebrate the anniversary of the triumph of North Vietnam over the South on April 30. The majority does not. So try to imagine Christmas and New Year's Eve, Easter and Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day, Thanksgiving and everyone in the family's birthday all rolled into one. This is Tet, the highpoint of life in Viet Nam.

I have been to Tuan's family home several times before. There are only earthen floors. There is little light. A front door and back door. But no windows. There are no doors separating rooms; living area, sleeping areas, kitchen, shower and toilet bleed into one another. But here Ba Ma (Mother and Father) reared eight children, the three youngest – all boys – sharing one bed into adulthood. Their "bedroom"

separates the living area from kitchen, shower, toilet and other "rooms." The ninth child, also a boy, died shortly after birth as the tanks of the victorious North Vietnam rolled down the streets of Saigon become Ho Chi Minh City on April 30, 1975.

If Chi Hoa's house is as small as a postage stamp, then Tuan's family house might be said to be the size of the tip of your index finger. With mother and father and eight children in such quarters, they knew one another's every movement. The habits and daily patterns of one became second nature to all the rest. They breathed the same air. Spoke the same words. The voice of the family was one.

Gradually I realized: Chi Hoa did not need to be in the same room to speak to Tuan. And Tuan did not need to strain to hear each of her whispered mumbles and grumbles about the cost of cashews, to feel the tides of her disappointment and frustration from the next "room."

WASTING WORDS

Kimanh decided to take us by car to Vung Tau, the seaside beach nearest Saigon. Vung Tau was the point of departure for many of the “boat people” fleeing Vietnam after 1975. Kimanh and Tuan have been friends for more than twenty years. The two friends sat in front. Me in the back.

The chatter began while we were leaving Saigon. It did not end for the nearly two hour journey. Tuan never spoke a word. He nodded from time to time – listening or falling asleep? I wondered from the back seat of the car. I had to make use of ear plugs to prevent a splitting headache as Kimanh went on and on and on. If ever there was a case of what the nuns who taught me in school called “diarrhea of the mouth,” this was it. The gushing of words went on without end!

Later as we walked the beach in Vung Tau I asked Tuan: “What was Kimanh going on about?” Again, rather matter-of-factly: “I have no idea. Something about her husband. I ignore that.”

MAGNIFICENT DISTRACTIONS

It is a poor, developing nation. But the people of Vietnam eat out often, almost daily. Sometimes they squat-sit over a bowl of steaming pho – hot noodle soup – on the sidewalk. Or sit on a plastic stool with a bowl of rice and tripe and tendon near a stall in the public market. Often they go as a family to a restaurant in the evening, always noisy with screeching, impatient hungry kids and waiters – some who scramble in the hope of a tip; others who seem to have given up and just shuffle from one table to the next.

In a scene not unfamiliar to Westerners, families often sit at table to eat with smartphone to ear or palm. Children – babies – are given some sort of gadget plaything so that Mom and Dad, Grandad and Grandma can chat or text away uninterrupted – by those at the table or anything going on around them, above all by the screeching of their

neglected children. No one at the table looks at one another. Each plate or bowl is eaten as if in solitary confinement. All attention is focused on the phone or the gadget: a magnificent distraction from the things that really matter – personal relationships, nourishing the body, the exchange of the gift of words at table.



THE IRREVERENCE OF CHATTER

Phaolo Bui Van Doc, Archbishop of Saigon, died in Rome on March 6, 2018 during the ad limina visit of the Vietnamese bishops to the Holy See. A heart attack took him without warning and quite quickly. His body was returned to Saigon for a funeral Mass on March 17. Over 15,000 Vietnamese Catholics, as well as a few Communist government officials, showed up for the funeral in the blistering heat of a steamy outdoor make-shift arena in Saigon’s District 1.

At the entrance to the site of the funeral, several large photographs flanked the walkway. There for all to see was the Archbishop laid in a coffin in full episcopal regalia. On each side of the coffin there were four Vietnamese clerics of varying ranks, ostensibly mourning the death of the Archbishop.



Lo and behold! – not surprisingly – a Vietnamese-American Monsignor, no doubt because of his insignificant and easily expendable curial position, had managed to snake his way up to the coffin to pay his “respects” in the presence of the Vietnamese bishops. There he was, front and center, in most of the photos, looking duly dour on this unhappy occasion. Again, not surprisingly and true to character, he is caught by the camera with his **MOBILE PHONE GLUED TO HIS EAR!** If I didn’t laugh out loud I would have cried!

Oh, the Fathers are always just so busy! Or so we are led to think. But does any phone conversation warrant such lack of grace and blatant disrespect for the dead? What possible urgency could there have been to warrant a phone chat at such a moment?

At the heart of Vietnamese culture is the veneration of ancestors. There is a deep reverence for the dead. Pictures of their beloved dead are found in nearly every Vietnamese home. Even with their respect for the clergy, the Vietnamese with whom I viewed these pictures were horrified by such a blatant display of disrespect in the presence of the corpse of the Archbishop of Saigon. What was this curial Monsignor thinking? Or did he even bother to take a moment to think as he was chatting away at such a sacred moment? One can only wonder: To whom? Who and what could possibly be so important? Each of these Vietnamese cameos offers a glimpse into what is involved in meaningful conversation. And into what is to be avoided if conversation is to be in any way meaningful. These insights may be useful to those whose gift and task is to help others deepen their relationship with God.

WHO IS GOD?

She had come away for retreat. This is not a common practice for Saigonese women. Most are tied either to home or workplace; or caught in the flood of motorbikes racing through the streets of Saigon. Tuyet, or Goretti (her baptismal name), is a single woman in her early fifties. This is rare for a Vietnamese woman, for whom family is the preeminent value.

She was very reticent to confide in me. I am a white American. Goretti was a girl when GIs swarmed the streets of Saigon looking for Lucky Strikes or to “get lucky” with pretty “yellow” girls in the days before 1975. Her memories linger. And her view of American men is mixed – at best.

At fifty-something she has a heavy dose of ennui. Goretti wonders why her sister was able to escape from Vietnam after 1975 while she got “stuck in a Communist country.” After all, it was Goretti who was and remains the faithful one. Her sister, on the other hand, does not do much in the way of religious practice. Yet it is she who prospers. Goretti’s sister has three children, all healthy and financially stable. She is soon to be a grandmother – for the second time. Haltingly, Goretti talked about the difference in personality between her sister and herself. As she did so, she was tottering at the brink of tears.

It came as no surprise that Goretti’s image of God is similar to that of so many other Catholics. “He” is an all-powerful interventionist, standing by as one patient succumbs to the ravages of cancer, yet jumping in to lift another from its grip. He shows favor to one, yet seems to be unheeding of the prayers of the faithful ones like Goretti. Then there is the default, kneejerk rush to defend this interventionist God with the language of God’s inscrutable ways and God’s permissive will. And then there is the slow – sometimes lifelong – painful task of accepting what is said to be the silver lining in God’s writing straight with crooked lines

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

On first hearing, Goretti’s question seems obvious: Why does God seem to favor my sister and “scorn” me? But is there more? Is there something deeper? Is there an issue beneath the issue as Goretti struggles to express herself in halting words, in stumbling speech? If so, how does the other partner in Goretti’s conversation tune in to this?

Here some of the insights from the cameos sketched above can help.



First, Goretti is engaged in intimate speech. Like so many others who struggle to speak of God, she is “up close” to her conversation partner. The Vietnamese people live in very close quarters. Even though most drive a motorbike like one in a school of minnows in the millions, it is not in their nature to speak of matters of the heart, of the soul, directly. And so the conversation partner must be alert not so much to the words being said, but the timbre of speech – to the color, the tone, the pulse coursing through the voice. Recall, Tuan’s Chi Hoa was – to this listener – on a verbal ramble with herself. But her younger brother was able to “hear,” to “feel” her speech because he was alert to the timbre in what was being said in the saying of it.

Second, it took a long time before Goretti was able to settle into the conversation. After the initial formalities in beginning a conversation, there are the usual verbal daytrips, sometimes very long and circuitous – or circumlocutious – before arriving at the place where a conversation can begin. Rarely are such daytrips propaedeutic to what lies ahead. They are most often wasted words as the conversation partner struggles toward greater intimacy in speech – or makes subtle efforts to avoid it. One helpful signal

I sometimes give the potential conversation partner to get on with it is to let her know – in facial and bodily gesture – this: It is not that she is boring me; I am just not interested in what she is saying. Don’t waste words, please. When there is nothing to say, say nothing!

Third, Goretti, like so many others, comes into the conversation with distractions beyond calculation. It is as if she has dozens of recordings playing in her head. Even as she tries to give her conversation partner her undivided attention she, like so many others, can be anywhere she wants to be, with whomever she wants to be, anywhere in the world, “chatting” with anyone with whom she cares to “chat” by pressing “send” with the index finger. In her head, cluttered by magnificent distractions, Goretti can be anywhere but where she actually is. Her focus can be on anyone or anything except what or whom is actually summoning her to be present and attentive at this time and in this place, in this particular here and this specific now. While her conversation partner is invested in serious exchange, and while Goretti expresses deep appreciation for the time and opportunity to speak about the presence and action of God in her life, her conversation partner should

not be duped into thinking that what has been said between them has actually registered with Goretti. Or that it actually matters to her! Like so many others, she does not live in her own skin. She is always somewhere else.

Fourth, in an age of “tweets,” Twitter, and Facebook, mobile phones and text messages, there is a lack of awareness of different modes of communication in different venues, and the protocol appropriate to each. Long ago, one did not talk in the library. Or chatter in church. One did not hear the vulgar and violent lyrics of Rihanna or Eminem blasting in a bookstore or coffee shop – to say nothing of the sexually explicit and verbally graphic images to which young children are being exposed in McDonald’s as their parents stuff them with some supposed “Happy Meal” at odd hours. There is a dulling of consciousness, a lack of awareness of surroundings, of what is appropriate in different settings. So viewers talk at full voice at the cinema, forgetting where they are. And with whom. If you are glued to a picture at home via your big screen TV while crunching at potato chips, or trying to focus on the screen in a movie theatre as you and those around you chomp on seven-dollar-a-crack tubs of hot buttered popcorn, does anybody really care if you decide to have a “conversation” with whomever happens to be in the seat next to you? Does it come as any surprise, then, that an overly and overtly ambitious cleric should decide to have a “conversation” on his mobile phone in the presence of a corpse in full episcopal regalia?

THE ISSUE BENEATH THE ISSUE

Conversation, especially of the deep most kind, requires a set of dispositions that must be cultivated, nurtured, and sustained if we are to engage in meaningful exchange. These might be articulated in reverse order from the way in which they have been treated above.

1. Be respectful. This calls for one to be alert to the



context in which the exchange of words is taking place. Recognize that texting and tweeting, mobile chats and Facebook postings, are for the transmission and receipt of information. Sending and receiving information is not conversation. “Chatting” is not real chatting.

2. Be attentive. It is said that while in the presence of a living saint, be it Mother Teresa or Jean Vanier, you feel like you are the only person in the world who matters to them – at that moment, in that time and place. Pope Francis has recently reminded us of the universal call to holiness in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate*. All the baptized are called to holiness, to become saints. Perhaps the first step on the road to sanctity today is to steer clear of so many magnificent distractions and pay attention, by learning how to look the other in the eye and listen with the ear of the heart.



3. Be modest. When speaking, don't display words for no good reason. Do not waste words. When there is nothing to say, say nothing. And know when to politely ignore endless chatter.

4. Be receptive. There are multiple ways in which the other may give speaking, especially in intimate matters such as personal relationships with another, others, and God.

Good conversation is a discipline. Without real discipline, we may exchange information, but there is no true conversation. Meaningful conversation entails turning toward the other with respect, attention, modesty, and receptivity.

Sometimes it takes a long time. With Goretti it took a lot of long and loving listening to hear the question behind the question, to help her in identifying the issue beneath the issue. Most assuredly Goretti had questions about the interventionist all-powerful God who seems to favor her sister over her. But her real question is about her own worthiness. Goretti is homely; her sister a breath-stopping beauty. Somewhere down the road Goretti might come to realize that God does not mete out beauty to some and not others. And that she is not being punished her whole life long for being plain.

It is in picking up the timbre, the color, the texture of her words that the real issue beneath the issue is able to surface. Only gradually comes the realization that Goretti is deeply ashamed. She is ashamed because she is speaking about a member of her own family to a stranger. This is because most Vietnamese people of an age – those who grew up in the aftermath of the “American War” – feel in their marrow that no one outside their own family can be trusted. And that the most meaningful conversations often cannot and do not take place in the open air, but within an intimacy in which one learns how to hear and feel the real word being spoken beneath and beyond all the words.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Michael Downey writes out of the experience of extended time spent in Vietnam teaching theology. He notes the challenge of creating an atmosphere for a respectful, meaningful conversation. In Vietnam, extremely close physical living conditions make it all the more difficult to be spiritually intimate. Have you found that to be true in relationships in your life? Does spatial or temporal distance sometimes make it easier to be open and vulnerable?
2. As the author reflects on the questions and struggles of Goretti, he makes the oft-cited point that the question at hand is not always the real question; the genuine issue is something much deeper. In Goretti's case, not accepting herself as she is has become a barrier to believing in a loving God. How is that dynamic playing out in your life and prayer? Have you seen that struggle in the hearts of people you were counselling or mentoring?
3. Michael Downey offers a startling, almost shocking image of a Monsignor all dressed up to pay final respects to the departed Archbishop, busy on his phone while near the casket with other prelates. He was not at all "present" to the moment and its significance. Think of a time you yourself did something comparable. Is that an area where you need some conversion?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Michael Downey has served as professor of theology and spirituality at universities and seminaries in North America and abroad. Schooled in the spirituality of Jean Vanier and l'Arche, his abiding concern for the wounded and marginalized has brought him to serve those most in need through conferences and retreats throughout the world. He currently serves as Professor of Theology at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam in Saigon. His many books include, *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality* (2000) and *The Depth of God's Reach: A Spirituality of Christ's Descent* (2018), both from Orbis Books.



CONVERSION IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: *A PERSONAL MEMOIR*

Phillip T. Cooke, SJ



I stare up the road just on the other side of Highway 18 on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in southwest South Dakota. I am alone. I feel afraid. The road is desolate, empty and cold. I walked this road many times, but this time I am not sure what will happen. My vocation and life are in a crisis.

EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S LOVE

For years I had dreamt about serving here as a Jesuit. The dream began stirring my senior year at the Jesuit high school in Kansas City. Our theology teacher, Fr. Jim, delivered the message clearly: "Men, you do not have to go back two-thousand years to follow Christ intimately. You can do it now. Right here, right now, today." My heart was burning with desire to follow Christ. I was unaware that such passion existed. The holy yearning to serve like and with Christ especially among the downtrodden, forgotten and marginalized conjured up much peace and joy within me. Yet, at seventeen years old, I do not think that my mind fully grasped the concept or the cost of discipleship. Still, I had experienced that mystical moment earlier in my life, which had prepared me for this moment of vocational discernment. Even now, I experience anxiety about sharing my childhood God – encounter but I know it needs to be shared.



It was a summer's day in the 1970's. I was ten years old. I was the only child of the four of us at home that afternoon. My mother was downstairs. She had spread the McCall's dress pattern across the front hallway floor. This was her craft; she worked diligently at creating modest expressions of fashion for herself. A craft that seems to be lost in our modern world. Her dresses always came out beautiful as she mixed the right colors, fabrics and talent into creation. Since it was summer, my mom sent me to my room after lunch to read, a common *ordo* for our home. I despised it though. I wanted to be outside playing or exploring like most young boys. I laid on my bed, bored and yearning to be outdoors.

Wearied from the dull afternoon I was looking out the window. It had a southern view into our backyard where my brother, family, neighbors and I played baseball all hours of the day during the

summer months. Beyond the yard lay the creek and woods where bobwhite songs and coyote howls were the signature background music of my childhood. I would look out this same window on most nights replaying the day's baseball game with vivid clarity. When the moon was full, it would make the sign of the cross through the screen that covered my window. The white cross blessed it all – the grass, the woods, my family, our playfulness and the day itself.

My backyard was holy—full of God's creation in the liveliness of my brother, family, neighborhood and myself along with the coyotes, sky, grass and birds. I did not realize it then, but I understand now that as I looked out the window that the Spirit and I were pondering and gazing together. We would say together "And God saw that it was good." Although my childhood was far from perfect, my Catholic upbringing stimulated my awareness and

imagination of the sacred. The world was holy, full and alive with love. God's presence, God's sacredness was flourishing in all things.

Suddenly, as I looked at it all that summer afternoon something pierced the monotony. It arrived in haste and broke through the stale summer day like fireworks lighting up the sky in July. The beauty, stillness and quiet of my backyard transformed into immense feelings of love. Tears of joy began to fall. I had always felt deeply about the world as a child but I had never felt love or God like this. The feelings ensued from trust: I had possessed much trust as a child and I had wanted to trust the Spirit even more that particular afternoon.

I journeyed downstairs and into the hallway where my mom was cutting the fabric. I could hear the scissors beat against the floor each time she closed its grip down on the pattern pinned to the cloth. She looked up and saw the tears. She was worried. She asked what was wrong and I replied "nothing." I badly wanted to tell her what I was feeling, how much love and peace was inside my soul but I could not find the words. If she could be creative in her dress making though, why could I not be creative with words about my experience? Of course, how does a ten year old tell someone about their deep, intimate experience of God? I was afraid, embarrassed and could not find any words at all. Besides, what if she did not believe me? What would it mean to tell her? Would she judge me and think me strange or weird? Would she dismiss my experience?

That is how these moments felt to me sometimes. I had at least one other moment such as this and I often wondered if my Catholic school friends or siblings had similar experiences. We never talked about it together, so I just assumed others did not have such occurrences. Even though I treasured the experience, I worried that I might be judged different and odd. I knew it was real. I knew it was true. But, if I continued to trust it what would happen to me?

Where might it take me? I was only ten. I have never forgotten that experience, even though I tried for a long time to push it away. Sometimes we do not trust our own experiences. For much of my adult life, I did not want to trust as I did as a child because I feared losing control. If I trusted and let go, the Spirit might take me some place I did not want to be.

THE CHALLENGES OF MINISTRY

Here I am now, twenty-five years later. It is my second year of my priestly ministry among the Lakota people. All I dreamt of and thought this moment would be has not arrived. I had thought serving with Christ among the marginalized and oppressed would fill me with that passionate fire I had felt in Fr. Jim's class that senior day. But, this day, anxiety and isolation filled my body, mind and soul. My disappointments were crushing the dream. I was distraught and beyond repair. After twelve years of Jesuit formation, I had arrived at this moment only to see the dream falling before my eyes. I could not see beyond struggle. How did I get here? How could I get out of this desolation? I had to do something so I began walking, hoping for something.

The evening's dusk was a sea of silence, stilling everything around the reservation, mild whistling ripples from the gentle winds traversing the prairie. I started sauntering up the winding Manderson Road. I could not see a cloud in the vast Lakota sky. With each step I took, I heard the crunch of icy, packed snow under my feet. The Lakota sun began to settle on the wide-open horizon on this winter day warning that darkness would soon begin to creep over the cold earth. For the moment, orange, red, yellow, and purple hues were twirling off the packed snow on the ground.

The beauty failed to dazzle or entice me. I did not want to take it in. I was preoccupied by disappointment at my lack of success, my apparent failure to bring something new to the Lakota people. My inability to liberate the poor was shattering the

"I was suffocating from the dysfunction, poverty, alcoholism, addiction and hopelessness of the reservation. I was sinking; and so was the vocation I thought God intended for me."

vision of what I thought a Jesuit priesthood was supposed to be. I was dismayed, tired and burnt out from all the chaos and suffering I had experienced in my year-and-a-half as a missionary parish priest. With the dream gone, all I had before me was nothing but the vast open space of the prairie, the sky and the calm (but chilling) whistling wind.

Many would probably have soaked in the beauty and peace of the place. But, for me, there was much pain behind it all. Doubts and struggle were everywhere - outside and within me. No place to hide, nowhere to run (in this open prairie.) I sang no glad song. I just kept moving towards the summit to speak to God. Wait. I did not want to speak to God; I wanted to barter with God. I staggered along the way. My pace slowed.

Within the first year-and-a-half of my priesthood, I truly had come to believe that I was failing, that I had made a colossal mistake choosing the Jesuits and priesthood. Why? I had worked unusually hard to become a priest. I had enjoyed profound experiences of God's love in my ten-year-old encounter and in high school. I had lived in war-torn Central America in the early 1990's and accepted all aspects of Jesuit formation. I was a devoted student of liberation theology. I was finally ready to put all my experiences and studies into action yet none of it was coming to fruition.

The experience of such desperate sentiments began back in the fall. It started with John Black Thorn's funeral. He was around my age. At forty-three year's old, he drank, numbed his pain with rubbing

alcohol, which ultimately lead to his death. Then Robert Moves Camp's funeral. An eighteen-year old who either was pushed or fell down his family's basement stairs. No one cared to admit it, but alcohol was involved. Next Casey's brother hung himself in the shack outside her home. She had nightmares and could not sleep. She would call me. Desperate and scared she would tell me that his ghost was still roaming the earth in death, and haunting their house and land. I was speechless, powerless. I did not know how to help her or anyone else. Just after Macy's brother's suicide, another occurred, Jim Black Bear. I presided at his funeral. He hung himself in prison because his court day was near, and he was up for abuse of a minor.

The seemingly hopelessness and despair the Lakota endure! Many of them grow up affected by historical trauma, poverty, and lack of necessary resources to thrive as humans. Many abuse alcohol to numb it all. The abuse affects all. I can do nothing about it. I have tried and tried but keep coming up short. Furthermore, these tragedies all occurred while my newly hired pastoral assistant, Jessica, had a serious car accident. She broke her back, neck and four fingers in her dominant hand. At the same time, other parts of our Jesuit mission, namely the schools, were thriving. Most of the others involved in the mission school were seemingly enjoying great success, while I was suffocating from the dysfunction, poverty, alcoholism, addiction and hopelessness of the reservation. I was sinking; and so was the vocation I thought God intended for me.

THE MOMENT OF CONVERSION

I reach the summit of Manderson Road. I have hit my emotional bottom. The anguish felt by so many Native Americans continues to torment and haunt the reservation, and now, it has its grip on me. I finally cry out on the cold, icy road and make the barter: “God! I cannot do this anymore!” I wait, listening. All I can hear is the wind blowing. I cry aloud again. “God, I cannot do this anymore!” And then somewhere deep within my brokenness, my cry, my helplessness, my limitations, God responds. His words quietly pulse through the earth and sky not in English or Lakota but deep within the silence of my yearning anguish and throughout the cry of Lakota across this ironic, desolate and beautiful land. I feel them. I hear them as clearly as when my mom called me to dinner as a child. “Phil. I never asked you to do it!”

“What?!” I counter with confusion.

I ask God again...just to confirm what I heard. I exclaim a final time, “God, I cannot do this anymore!”

He responds. “Phil, I never asked you to do it. Now would you get out of the way, and let me do this work? Let me do it through you!” I am shocked. Jolted. Painfully surprised. And relieved. “Oh, this is how it works! I smile enormously from the relief and the death—of my own will, my own ego that had gotten in the way and I did not even know it. Finally.

I translate the words now, both for you and me. They come in two forms: bad news and good news. The bad news: “Phil, it is not about you.” The good news: “Phil, it is not about you!” What is “it”? Everything. The whole project: my work, my ministry, my vocation, my priesthood is not mine to possess or even manage. All these holy vocational aspirations are not my endeavor. The message hits home. God threw a dart right into my gut and hit the bullseye. I know it is real. Soon after hearing God’s direct message, I start walking back down the hill. The sun

is behind the horizon now although much of the evening’s orange and blue twilight remain. The sky is still cloudless. Suddenly, I feel tingling of warm water and affection on my cold, red cheek. It comforts me. A feeling of peace begins to rise within me. I walk a few more steps, and I feel the soothing touch again. My cheek is warm now. The heat travels through the rest of my body and being. I am one with moment. My God, My God, you have not forsaken me. You have sent your messenger, your angel to comfort and give me assurance in this time of deep desperation and despair. My conversion begins. God initiates and I accept.

PUTTING MY CONVERSION INTO PRACTICE

I now understand that I made two major mistakes in my Jesuit and priestly ministry. First, I made many assumptions about the Lakota people. Despite living in one of the most economically poor counties (previously named Shannon but now called Oglala) in the United States of America, the Lakota have a beautiful, deep and reverent spiritual practice within their celebrated ceremonies such as the sun dance, sweat lodge, and yuwipis (healing ceremonies) to name a few. They also possess and practice a wide and deep understanding of family love and loyalty that has helped me broaden my understanding of relatives. Their resilience and survival skills from years of historical trauma and oppression are quite remarkable. Actually, their culture and spiritual practices surpass the outwardly defined label of poverty which so many outsiders push upon them. So who was I to think I could truly liberate them?

This leads me to my second mistake. I put myself before God and I did not even know it. For years, I thought I had to do it all. I was trying to force the cure and fix the problems of others. God was on my side, but I kept him behind me. I had to lead. I had to be the hero. I had to be out front to get the glory. What the Creator revealed to me on the Manderson Road was a daunting, sobering truth that I was finally able to hear: I am not God. I have to resign to

the fact that I am not capable of liberating others. I am not capable of even freeing my own very self. I am a simple human being, nothing more.

PREACHING TO MYSELF

I celebrate mass the following Sunday at St. Agnes Church in the town of Manderson, South Dakota, about nine miles from the historical reservation town of Wounded Knee. It is Gaudete Sunday. The gospel is from the first chapter of John.

So they said to [John the Baptist], “Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?”

He said:

“I am ‘the voice of one crying out in the desert. Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

Some Pharisees were also sent.

They asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?”

John answered them, “I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.”

Make straight the path of the Lord, says John the Baptist. How do we do this today? God gave me an answer. We make straight the path by getting out of the way and letting the Spirit make the path straight for us and through us. As I begin to preach the homily, I eagerly told the congregation about my experience on the Manderson Road, the story you have heard. I was thrilled to have a Lakota congregation before me. They are a rich, mystical people, open to God’s revelation through messengers such as angels and spirits. They possess a similar spiritual imagination as us Catholics. I know they will understand how God’s angel touched me on the Manderson Road.

When I stress the insight about letting God take the

lead, I pause. Now, as a preacher I have discovered that there are these moments of pregnant, silent pauses when words suspend human chronological time. During this suspension, God prods me to remember his voice, his word inside my gut and soul. It is the process of entering into God’s time and language, an interchange that reaches for a spiritual knowledge undiscoverable in any other way than to simply—pause and listen. At this moment, I have an immediate intuitive flash back. It was three years ago during my theology studies when I was on Stinson Beach in Marin County just north of San Francisco, California. I bypassed an invitation to go into the city of San Francisco with some friends, and I decided to run on the beach. It was dusk and I was enjoying the solitude. God’s voice came to me as I kept running and running along the beach. I just kept running and I am not sure where the energy came from. I clearly remember Him telling me to go slow. I kept hearing him speak to my heart: “Go slow, Go slow, Phil.” I brought this moment to my spiritual director and told her with enthusiasm that God was telling me to go slow, but I know there is more to his words. There is more that he wants to tell me. I could feel. I just do not know what it is right now.

I let God lead me back into the homily. It seems like an eternity, but only a couple of seconds have passed. Now in this moment, standing, preaching somewhere in the middle of human time (chronos) and God’s time (kairos), between heaven and earth, I feel an enormous peace and love. Finally, I am starting to understand everything. The “more” that God was trying to tell me was really about me surrendering to him and letting him work through me. I shout aloud to the congregation, “Oh my brothers and sisters in Christ! God has been telling me for years to just show up as a Jesuit and as a priest, but then to let him do the rest! Amen!” I cannot handle the feelings now I have inside. The tears are flowing. The same tears and the exact feeling I had when I was ten years old and tried to explain to my mom. I finally allow the Spirit to arrive





and she shows up with passionate vigor and love. The tears continue to flow through the rest of the mass. I can barely make it through the Eucharistic prayer. I drink the chalice of passion. I turn to give it to Sr. Catherine, a Lakota sister, and without hesitation I say to myself, "This is what I am supposed to be doing with my life!" I had so many doubts and now I am overflowing with confidence and assurance.

A NEW FREEDOM AND JOY

The unexpected, unspeakable beauty occurred. I cried out to God on the Manderson Road. I finally was able to admit my powerlessness and a tiny crack of space opened between my ego and true self. God then surprised me. He saw the crack, even though I was unable, full of shame, and afraid. I was terrified really. But, God entered that little, lonely, desperate place within me anyway because I finally admitted the truth. I am merely a human. And that can be one of the most liberating concepts we ever encounter within ourselves. The Spirit came to me through the back door, on a broken, cold, twisted, frozen winter road in Lakota country, in rural South Dakota.

Alas, I begin to understand that the liberation which I was seeking and fighting for never bore fruit because I was bound by my own self-determined will. I was not aware. I was asleep. I was blind. Accepting my limitations and my humanity allows

God to give new life in the Spirit. Surrender is a wonderful and marvelous midwife.

My conversion continues. I live out my experience on Manderson Road every day; indeed, not just every day but every moment of every day. I do imagine, however, that for many of us believers that we often conceive of spiritual or religious conversion as a moment that derives from morally good behavior, consolation, joy and the comforts of a loving community. In today's often watered down Christianity we can tend to believe that a spiritual conversion is an easy process. It is simple enough to understand conceptually, but the application is not easy. It happens when we are honest – with ourselves and with God. Conversion does not happen by chance or coincidence; it requires the hard work of letting go of the need to control. (Actually, truth be told, we are detaching from just the illusion of control.) The greatest conversion I actually experienced came from a personal, existential crisis, a painful tragedy in my life. It was the worst day of my life. It is now the best day I have ever lived.

I now understand the magnificent line from the poet Hafiz: "I am a hole in a flute in which the Christ's breath moves through, listen to the music." May all of us have the courage to be nothing else but a simple hole.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Fr. Cooke has shared with us very intense personal experiences of God, each one building on previous experiences and all coming to a climax as he undergoes a personal crisis, a moment of conversion. Consider the trajectory of your own relationship with God: have you experienced a similar pattern of God “leading” you gently (but firmly) to a deeper conversion?
2. The author’s conversion involved many things coming together but principally it seemed to be about giving up preconceived expectations and being willing to surrender to gift and mystery. What did you learn from hearing Fr. Cooke’s personal witness?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phillip T. Cooke, S.J., is a priest of the United States Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus. He currently ministers as the associate pastor of Gesù Church in Detroit where he spends time both in the parish and grade school. He has worked at the University of Detroit Mercy where he founded the Center for Social Entrepreneurship and at Red Cloud Indian School where he taught high school and was a pastor. He has a passion for walking with youth especially those most at risk.

He grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, and studied philosophy at Creighton University. He wrote his Licentiate in Sacred Theology at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University on liberation theology and social entrepreneurship followed by a fellowship at the first Jesuit-In-Residence at the Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship at Santa Clara University. He is forever grateful to the Lakota people of the Pine Ridge Reservation who he attributes giving him many spiritual gifts through their resilience, reverence and faith in the Creator.



A CHARISM AT THE 10TH STATION: RESILIENCE OF CONGREGATIONS

Patrick Sean Moffett, CFC, Ph.D.

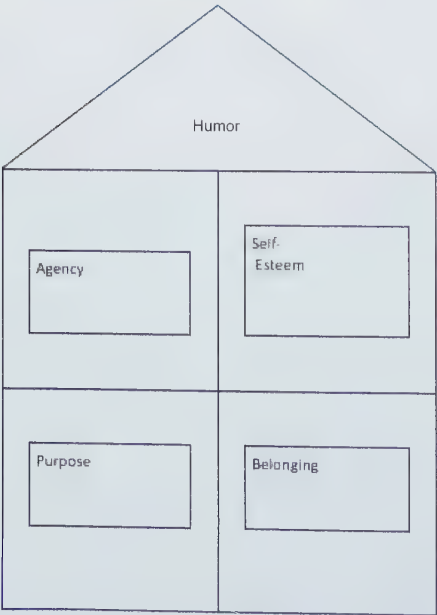
In 2016 the Dominicans celebrated the 800th anniversary of their founding. The Franciscans reached this milestone in 2009. The families established by Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica are now approaching one and a half millennia in the service of the Lord. The Carmelites, originally formalized as the religious community in the late 12th century, trace their origins to Elijah and Elisha -- perhaps mindful of the suppressions of religious groups perceived as latecomers.

Meanwhile other groups, with long-term stories of distinguished service building up the people of God, are in various stages of diminishment, some merging with others in a similar state, and others simply disappearing. Having journeyed the way of Jesus Christ, they arrive at the tenth station. Stripped of signs of their vitality, the institutions to which they gave life, the mother house, the formation program, the legions of new aspirants, they ponder the Charism of their founders and ask whether it achieved the end for which it graced the People of God or might it be awaiting a new phase, a Pentecost revelation of another way to be sisters and brothers to the emerging world. Butterflies shed the cocoon, a rocket soars as it jettisons the earlier phases of its ascent, and seed shells release new life.



The question arises, what underlies the resilience of some Congregations and the fragility of others? While not taking on this question directly, the article will propose a framework for exploring various dimensions of continuity. The presentation extrapolates from the stories of individual survivors, mostly children and youth, factors that might be applicable to corporate longevity.

THE “CASETTA OF RESILIENCE”



In the concluding decades of the last millennium, child care workers attended to tens of thousands of children and youth who had fled the wars, famines, and civil turmoil of afflicted homelands. We became particularly attentive to recurring expressions of purpose, belonging, self-esteem, agency, and a captivating sense of humor. A simple stick drawing of a four room, two story house with an attic became the framework for sorting out common elements in a great diversity of lived experiences of survival. This “casetta of resilience” served and serves interdisciplinary teams of child and youth care specialists in understanding the distinguishing gifts of these individuals, in sharing insights about their development, and in planning strategies that might facilitate the application of proven skills in a new context. (See HD Summer 2010; HD Fall 2011)

The possibility that Congregational resilience, and, in fact the resilience of any group, recapitulates the stories of resilient individuals, is the leitmotif of this article. The model proposed has been extracted from the life-stories of children and youth who have overcome daunting odds, enduring tumult, loss and journeys which others have not survived. I will be suggesting the usefulness of viewing corporate resilience from the perspective of the cognitive structures and the dynamics of human behaviors evidenced in these individuals.

Contrary to recent decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, groups do not incorporate into persons. They merit attention as having a life that is not synonymous with that of their members. Sr. Patricia Wittberg, SC, in *Building Strong Church Communities: A Sociological Overview*, notes a drift toward anthropological and psychological explanations in studies purporting to be sociological. In the spirit of full disclosure, I bring to the issue of this article, the worm’s eye view of a psychologist. I invite the reader, from her or his own field, to bring the discussion to another level.

CHAPTERS AS ECCLESIAL EVENTS

The Chapters of Religious Congregations are critical moments for addressing issues of continuity.

The participants attend to the corporate health and potential for ministry of their group. Efforts at renewal dip into yesterday and today to open the possibilities of tomorrow.

These gatherings are understood to have an impact that goes far beyond the membership. Facilitators will often call attention to the current significance of a letter written in 1976 by Cardinal Eduardo Francisco Pironio, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious. He characterizes Chapters as ecclesial events. What happens every six or so years as selected representatives of a given religious community come together marks not only the state of being and becoming of the membership, but also that of the many touched by their lives and ministries. Any member of the Mystical Body in celebration or in pain, confidence or doubt, thriving or perishing, affects the whole body with varying degrees of impact.

The final days of Chapter, much like the conclusion of homilies, workshops, days of reflection, retreats, courses, counseling sessions, as well as the programs of initial and on-going formation, invite the participants to create an agenda accommodating the application of lessons learned to current and future journeys. We ask what needs to be resolved so that the impact of the experience endures. The trace of what has been learned, the resilience of the message, becomes a measure of the effectiveness of our interventions as educators, directors, or counselors. We look to teachers whose lessons have endured. Moses and Jesus are standouts.

RESILIENT LESSONS OF MOSES AND JESUS

The power of Genesis and Exodus becomes a unifying bond for the Jewish people. Exodus 13 points the way inviting the annual retelling of the story. The questions asked by the child at the Seder

meal invite each new generation into the experiences of their ancestors. Faithfulness to the most faithful Lord assures liberation and the on-going choice of life.

In the Jesus school of discipleship, there is a shift in methodology as the Galilean turns toward Jerusalem. The disciples are alerted to challenges, foretold terrible times, reminded of their inadequacies and promised the Spirit Advocate. The core of the lesson was ritualized and memorialized for future ages as the early Church recalled the story and broke bread.

In time the ritualization takes on its own life and structures, at first fostering, but eventually restraining the founding dynamism. Jesus challenged those who believed they were continuing the work of Moses. Religious challenge the Church. And, as we experience in our times, men and women of a new day challenge the relevance of entrenched expressions of religious life.

CORPORATE BELONGING AND THE FOURFOLD CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

The Vatican II Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, (*Perfectae Caritatis*) urged all religious groups to return to the inspiration of a founding charism as we examined our faithfulness:

1. to Jesus Christ and His Gospel message,
2. to the Church and her mission,
3. to the inspiration and charism of our founder
4. to the men and women of our times.

We might ask today: What have we done with the Mystery of God that illumined the face of Moses?

Where is the joy of those who have encountered Jesus Christ? What is separating religious communities from the poor they are called to serve? If Christianity is all about love, what is restraining or sapping the energy of the professional lovers of the Church and of the world?

At varying levels of belonging, members help create, take on, and give expression to aspects of the corporate house. E.g., we are the Church.

A challenge facing those entering any group is that of coming to a sense of belonging within the new context. A four phase gradient of belonging has proven helpful in the examination of how an individual is inserted within a given group. Steps are traced from initial acceptance, to participation in the activities of the group, to genuine engagement in the dynamics of the group, to a level identified as proprietorship.

In parallel stages of development the corporate house, the Congregation, becomes identified with the ambitions, skills, dynamics and accomplishments of its inhabitants. *See how those Christians love one another.* It acquires a reputation--can we say an identity? There are distinguishing characteristics, expected activities and a place in a larger universe of other corporate groups.

Much as individuals identify themselves by the groups in which they experience belonging, so the Congregation defines its place among the faithful of the Church, as women or men professing one of the various expressions of religious life. They belong in a particular tradition (Augustinian, Franciscan, and Carmelite), engage in defined areas of ministry (parishes, hospitals, schools), commit to serving a particular group (abandoned, incarcerated, people made poor).

Sinfulness and its acknowledgement also play significant roles in articulating the way a Congregation is experienced from the outside and from within. In our times, child abuse scandals demand corporate responses. Periods of crisis can lead to new life, or to death.

Enhanced engagement with laity, by choice and by circumstance, plays a role in the life of most religious congregations. Collaborators in ministry, sharers in the spirituality and prayer life of the

group, volunteers and committed associates, are understood to be members of an extended network. Some speak of a family consisting of those inspired by the Charism of a given congregation. Times of Chapter invite consideration of forms and degrees of belonging, of membership, of participation, and of representation. Who is one of "us?" Who is not? Where are the boundaries? When drawn too rigidly, life is lost. When they are too porous, membership loses meaning.

Each re-iteration of a Congregation addresses the question of resilience for today and tomorrow. The resilience of a Congregation resides in its capacity to welcome new life. The community that is not attending to new membership is choosing death. Chapter Documents envision the directions of Congregation life and, as such, become templates for the work of formation. The wisdom of the Chapter illumines the accompaniment of those who seek membership within this religious community.

CORPORATE PURPOSE

The stories of the young survivors often reveal a strong sense of purpose -- to escape impossible situations, to give hope to a mother's dream, to get a job and save my siblings, to build a life. Their sense of belonging is often accompanied by a set of oughts ranging from expected behaviors to a basic philosophy of life. As a child I ought to listen to my elders, as the oldest sibling I ought to show the way, as a young male I ought to contribute to the family economy, as a Moslem I ought to live righteously.

The classic field-theory of Kurt Lewin invites consideration of force fields induced into the life space of individuals by the presence of significant others, values, mores, commitments and expectations. Groups take on societal roles with large sets of expectations. From outside and from within, religious congregations have an abundance of oughts influencing their corporate behaviors.

Constitutions and successive re-articulations of

mission statements, goals, objectives, and action plans define the corporate purpose. Those doing the editing need to be mindful of influences emanating from their own needs and interests as adults at a particular stage of development. In seeking a reading on the corporate commitments of a Congregation, it is instructive to attend to the age distribution of the members. Models of psychological development of adults (e.g. Erickson, Jung, Levinson, Sheehy.....) suggest possible characteristics, tendencies and needs that may take on motivational power within the group. Themes of generativity, survival, security, dignity in later years, may begin to dominate in more senior groups while less evident in newly constituted groups.

The corporate behavior of congregations occasionally makes evident a variety of un-stated motivating factors (fear, lack of trust, control issues, pride, and competitiveness) that go beyond and may even conflict with the published community purposes. Values clarification is needed at all levels and is one of the purposes of Chapters.

We ask individuals how they invest their time, energy and resources. So too Congregations do well to examine basic questions concerning distribution of human and material resources with respect to declared goals of proclaiming the reign of God, witnessing to Jesus Christ, worshiping, being sister or brother to the marginal, or engaging in whatever is seen as the core mission of the group. Personnel directories and budgets are very telling documents.

CORPORATE SELF-ESTEEM

Positive self-esteem, while sometimes fragile, was found to be a distinguishing characteristic of many of the survivors. Perhaps we were seeing the results of effective parenting, or of the reflected appraisals of their peers, or simply awareness that they had made it to safe ground when others had not. These girls and boys, young men and young women expressed notable confidence in who they were and firm conviction that they would find their rightful place in this new setting.

Groups work hard at establishing a corporate image that can be embraced both by membership and the larger social community. Recently Cadillac cars and Tiffany jewelry, seeking to distance themselves from staid images of past elegance, launched well designed and very costly strategies to re-position themselves as status symbols for an emerging generation and as “unapologetically modern.” The advertisement, web sites and other recruitment materials of religious congregations testify to the use of CARA data with respect to what youth seek in religious life. The validity of the images will be tested by those so attracted. Congregations in which members genuinely esteem who they are and what they seek to be as a group should do well under such scrutiny.



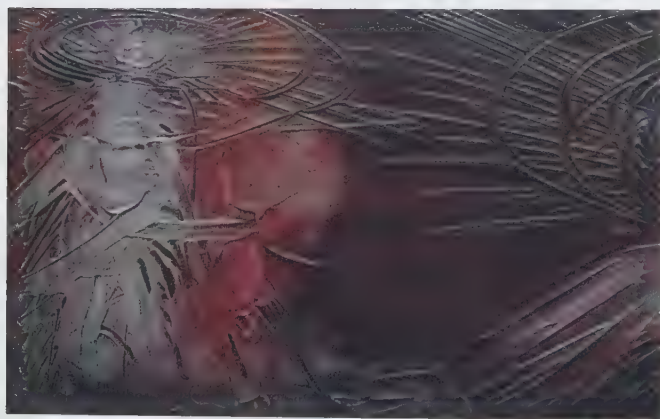
CHAPMAN Butterflies

Esteem, in the case of individuals, is strongly influenced by the groups in which one establishes a sense of belonging. *I am a member of an honor society, an alum of a distinguished university, a member (or simply a fan) of a winning team, a citizen of the best nation in the world.* The qualities of the groups become expropriated as personal attributes. Similar dynamics can be witnessed among groups as they locate themselves within larger constellations: we religious, we sisters, we brothers, we preachers of the gospel. *We disciples of Jesus Christ are a vital expression of the traditions of Francis, Augustine, Dominic, the Fathers, the Mothers, the wisdom figures, the radicals, the reformed, the reforming, the traditionalists....*

CORPORATE AGENCY

We build groups in our own image and likeness. We ascribe to them a will, a heart, and an identity. We also imbue them with our most vital experience of personal expression, our agency.

While at the center of most philosophical explorations through the ages, the purposeful behavior of human beings received little focused attention in American psychology until the 1950's. In his now classic manuscript, *Becoming*, Gordon Allport protested that his colleagues were absorbed in tracing behavior into past personal history while individuals are living their lives into a chosen future. The insight awaited the new millennium before taking center stage in the zeitgeist of "positive psychology." Motivational theorists attend to individuals' experience of being in control of their world, or being controlled by external forces; of directing their actions, making choices, acting on personal discernment, effecting changes in their world. Allport described such human engagement as *proprie striving*.



The stories of our young survivors are replete with personal inventiveness, risk taking, clever evasions, determined resistance, fortitude, restraint, and careful attentiveness to the ideal moment for action. Admonitions of parents, childhood fables, stories of patriotic or religious heroism, provided a reservoir from which they extracted possible ways of

confronting new realities. *Personal agency* is deeply rooted in purpose, belonging, self-esteem and past experience. We can project the same on *corporate agency*.

As individuals chose to engage in behavior that advances their goals or gives expression to their sense of identity and belonging, so too groups seek to align corporate action with corporate goals and ideals. Chapters play a critical role in both examining these actions and in committing the Congregation to future action plans -- might we say, strategies of *proprie striving*?

Congregations ask: *What do we believe we are doing? What can we do? What ought we do? What are we being called to do?*

The agency of a congregation emanates from a mix of acquired resources, claim on divine assistance, history of success and failure, enthusiasm for taking risks, learned helplessness, fluidity of talents, acceptance of responsibility, and the openness among membership to a call to leadership.

Moses clearly defines the matter: Choose Life, pursue freedom, avoid idolatry, and welcome strangers. Jesus complicates the choices by modeling an element of submission. The appropriate choice may not be one of movement against opposing forces, but rather a willingness to accept rejection, abandonment, mistreatment and pain, to embrace fragility. As St. Paul mused: *When I am weak, then I am strong. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.*

In the midst of such perplexity, it is most beneficial to have a good sense of humor.

CORPORATE HUMOR

Humor can be salvific in the midst of stress. An individual's capacity to deal with the dissonance of conflicting demands involves a facility for transitioning into another cognitive space. A break for lunch in the midst of intense negotiations, or time-out during an athletic competition, or a stretch

mid-way through an exam, all permit a resorting of the issues involved and a recouping of the energy necessary for carrying on. In particularly challenging circumstances, humor may be one of the few options available. A good laugh among soldiers in a fox-hole, or surgeons around an operating table, or politicians before a hostile press, may defuse the situation and open new avenues of progress.

The accounts of the youthful survivors are replete with humorous incidents that accompanied their dangerous, often painful, journeys to safety – the stories they invented to get past an overly zealous gatekeeper, the games they devised during periods of detention, the tricks they played on each other to break the tension of endless vigils. Those of us receiving youngsters in Italy became increasingly aware of what was termed the *spiritoso* – words and actions expressing comic turns or deep feelings and inviting the listener into moments of shared affect. Even in the telling there would be a testing of the interviewer’s own sense of humor, ability to distinguish truth from exaggeration, readiness to respond to playful leads.

Humor is often the key to a trove of memories rich in affective content. Emotion laden incidents from childhood, family lore, folk tales heard night after night, music and songs, lingering images, smells, and recurring dreams, recollections of times past, good and not so good -- all serve as the stuff of fantasy. Here it is possible to try on the costumes of another “self,” to rearrange the parts of pressure filled times into more tranquil scenarios of the possible. Here there is space for hope and joy.

For members of religious congregations, memories of formation are often a source of great merriment as current and former members celebrate periodic reunions. Stories of the characters, professed and aspiring, come alive with dramatic renditions of solemn moments broken open with the foibles of youthful exuberance. The group is convulsed in laughter as a simple gesture, accent, or expression, announces the retelling of a shared recollection.

I considered my own novitiate group uniquely blessed in the divergent personalities, dramatic actors, exuberant jokesters and incorrigible clowns among the brothers involved in our formation years. Now serving on a leadership team with men who had been scholastics during my days as a formation director, I know, to my delight and occasional embarrassment, they were the beneficiaries of similar blessings.



CHAPMAN The Holy Spirit

Stories, told and re-told, build the bonds that sustain individuals and groups in times of doubt. A sacred history, honest about foibles, unearned graces, naïve risks, and false assumptions, make evident the human nature of the members and suggest a bit of playfulness in the movements of the Holy Spirit.

Fr. James Martin, SJ in *Between Heaven and Mirth*, offers a timely reminder that laughter is not foreign to the Church.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The *casetta* of resilience serves in gathering the personal revelations of each of the youngsters and the observations of the professionals receiving them. The contents of the five rooms provide an initial

sketch of the life space of the youth. Subsequent interaction and observation add to the adequacy of the representation and often suggest areas that would benefit from some form of intervention. For example: exercises in values clarification may help refine and enhance a sense of purpose; opportunities for intercultural exchanges can foster greater awareness and appreciation of belonging to a given group; affirmation of progress augments self-esteem; training in marketable skills extends the domain of personal agency; time to laugh and to bring others to laughter have an impact on the whole house. So it is for an individual. And for a religious congregation?

Returning to the special time of Chapter, we might assign the outcomes of our discernment, our findings, proceedings, tendencies, actions and insights to the various rooms of the casetta. Should we find one or other of the rooms relatively neglected, it may require some added attention. A group that is not clear in its purposes, grounded in its internal and external connectedness, appreciative of its unique role, or convinced of its agency in addressing its own needs and those of the individuals and groups it is called to serve, may find it useful to take time to entertain and be entertained by ascending to its attic of humor. Well-timed pauses permitting drift into affective domains with celebration, relaxation, play, and even time to sleep, to daydream, to laugh, and to cry, bring new light and fresh air to each angle of the house.

Moses never set foot in the Promised Land yet the stories of his encounters with the Lord and the years of the Exodus are the intergenerational life-line of his people. Jesus, the night before his death, takes advantage of a Passover meal to express his appreciation of his companions. How I longed to share this meal with you. He nourishes them with food, example and prayer. He alerts them to hard times ahead and offers two life-lines: the Spirit to remind them of all they have been taught and the bond of their mutual affection -- *By this they will know you, your love for one another.*

The lesson from our youthful survivors is that resilience does not abide in any one part of the house, but rather in the unique integration of purpose, belonging, self-esteem, and agency kept viable with regular treatments of humor, down drafts from the realms of the “spiritoso.”

Pope Francis asks for a personal and Congregational report from that domain: *It is for all of us to ask ourselves if one who meets us perceives in our life the warmth of faith, sees in our faces the joy of having encountered Christ.* (Oct. 14, 2013 Plenary Assembly, Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization.)

We take up the journey once again, relish the blessings along the way, and go beyond the falls. We pause. Stripped away are the trappings of earlier phases. The cocoons, the launching pads, and the shells liberate, in forms we strain to recognize, Charisms required in every age.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Brother Moffett suggests that the resilience of individuals (particularly youth facing horrible challenges) can give us clues as to ways religious congregations can face contemporary challenges. Would you say that you yourself are a resilient person – perhaps having overcome great losses, disappointments, a health crisis, and addiction issues? If you are a member of a congregation, do you see healthy resilience in your membership? (The same questions can also apply to our own families.)
2. The author emphasized humor as the essential “glue” that holds together the four other “building blocks” of resilience. Think about co-workers, relatives, leaders and friends who spark daily discussions, debates and tasks with their sense of humor; thank God for them and remember – to appreciate humor is equally important as being the one who is causing us to laugh at ourselves.
3. The author uses the image of the 10th station of the cross: Jesus stripped of His garments. He seems to imply that individuals as well as organizations and congregations need periodic “down-sizing” or purification so as to better focus on their core mission. If Christ allowed himself to be so emptied out, the process seems necessary for us all. Do you agree? How might this process be at work in your life, your family, your congregation or parish at this time?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brother Patrick Sean Moffett, CFC, Ph.D., is a member of the leadership team of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North American Province. A former professor of psychology and pastoral counselling at Iona College and President-Emeritus of the Girls' and Boys' Towns of Italy (A Chance in Life, Inc.), he currently serves on the Executive Board of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

Artwork

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TURN, TURN, TURN

Msgr. John Zenz

All living things are in motion: the Earth turns around the sun, sunflowers are drawn toward the light, human beings and animals instinctively need to stretch. Even when we are not capable of physical movement, we still engage in movement of the mind and heart. Mentally and physically, we are always turning *toward* someone or away *from* someone. The giving and receiving of love involves the same dynamism of turn – gazing upon the one we love and who loves us or turning away out of shame, anger or disappointment. We all know the familiar lines of Ecclesiastes 3, “to everything there is a season...” We live through seasons of personal and communal transitions. We do not turn alone; most often we turn *together*. One way to speak about this dynamism of constant “turning” is the word “conversion.” Literally, the word means “to turn *toward*” or “to turn *with*.” As a way of concluding this issue of Human Development on the theme of Conversion, I offer the following as a personal meditation that could also be of use in a communal celebration in preparation for the Sacrament of Penance.



IMAGING CONVERSION

As a lens for reading this examen, I offer some images. In one of the opening scenes of the Roberto Benigni film *Life is Beautiful*, Guido Orefice, the Jewish Italian bookshop owner, sitting in the “nosebleed” section of a German opera house, notices a tall, elegant woman in one of the boxes. He desperately wants her to look his way that they might connect. He keeps muttering his prayer “Tourna a me,” that is, “(turn/look at me).” Eventually the mental telepathy works, they connect, and the romance paves the way for an improbable marriage, a child and then forced separation from his wife and deportation with his daughter to a Nazi concentration camp. The imagery of this scene relates well to our relationship with God. Like the Jewish character, God is always turned toward us, seeking our response of love. As He turns toward us He seeks our turn/conversion toward Him. The same dynamism is also at work in all our relationships. We are attracted and drawn out of ourselves by goodness, beauty and truth. Conversion is not just about turning away from sin or unhealthy behavior; ultimately it is a response to love.

I offer a second image: sitting before an icon. We do not simply look at an icon, we gaze upon the icon

even as the figures in the icon search us out. There is a mutuality of knowing and being known as we gaze upon the Lord or any of the saints; we feel God’s presence and enter into the scene. Mutual real presence leads to conversion, new ways of thinking and understanding, new ways of action and commitment. This mystery is especially depicted and embodied in the 15th century Russian icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rublev: each of the persons of the Trinity are turned toward each other in total self-gift. As we pray with the icon we cannot help but be drawn into their communion of life and love. We are converted anew by their eternal silent presence with and for each other and all of us.

In all conversion, God takes the lead. He initiates the relationship as He reveals His love. Our “turning” is essentially a response to His gift and call. As He turns toward us He invites us to turn even more deeply toward Him, to share in His presence of love.

1. INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

“What I know of Thee I bless
As acknowledging Thy stress
On my being and as seeing

Something of Thy holiness.”
(G.M. Hopkins, Thee God)

In the Scriptures, to “know” someone means much more than acquiring information about a person. To know, in the Biblical sense, is to have an intimate bond with the other. St. Paul speaks in this vein in I Corinthians 13 when he muses on the life to come and says that he will “know as he is known.” We know God, ourselves or others as we choose the way of vulnerability and openness. There is a direct correspondence between self-knowledge and knowledge of God. The psalmist cries out “Lord, you have probed me and you know me, you know when I sit and stand, you understand my thoughts from afar...” (Psalm 139).

The knowledge that leads to conversion is knowledge of the heart. Heart speaks to heart.

- *Am I willing to let God take the lead in my life and love me as He chooses and reveal himself as He chooses?*
- *Do I let God truly know me?*
- *Do I truly want to know the other, to understand the way the other is thinking and try to appreciate his/her life experience? Am I willing to turn away from my own initial fears or prejudices as to turn toward others and enter their world?*
- *As I intellectually assent to belief in God as gift-giver, creator and savior, do I also trust in providence and His plan of love for us all? Do I daily surrender to His love? Do I believe that whatever suffering and struggles He allows to come my way, He is also sharing with me?*
- *Am I open to having my mind and heart changed through study and dialogue, prayer and contemplation?*
- *Think about a time/way you learned new information and had to let go of prior fixed opinions or conclusions: was the conversion a positive experience of new energy?*

2. MORAL CONVERSION

“Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the Law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God depending on faith.” (Philippians 3:7-9)

- *Is my understanding of morality a matter of conforming to external rules so as to please God and win the esteem of those around me?*
- *Am I attentive to an inner voice calling me to let go of my own arrogance and need for control of every situation? Do I truly believe in a God of love and forgiveness?*

- *Am I able to hand over to the Lord my entire past with all of its painful and embarrassing moments, trusting in His healing love? Is there anything that I hold back from the Lord and refuse to bring to the light of day? Do I share with good friends or spiritual counselors those things about myself that I struggle to accept?*
- *At the core of my heart do I listen for the voice of the Lord trying to speak to me through my human weaknesses, urges and fears? Do I follow all the way to their root the things that seem to draw me this way or that? Do I seek to understand the connection of my various sinful patterns of behavior and how they all flow from lack of trust in God or fear of openness to new possibilities? Do I hold on in anger and bitterness to ways that I feel abandoned by God or hurt by others? What name do I hear God calling me in the intimacy of my heart?*
- *What is the vocation within my vocation at this moment of my life? To what specific act of turning toward God or others do I feel called at this time?*
- *Am I obsessed by any particular addictions or urgent language in my life? Is there any particular desire or fear that prevents me from being truly free, available and open to new possibilities?*

3. TRINITARIAN CONVERSION

“For this reason, I kneel before the Father from whom every family on heaven and earth is named, that He may grant you in accord with the riches of His glory to be strengthened with the power of His Spirit in the inner self and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... To Him who was able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:14-17, 20-21)

- *To whom do I pray: ...to a God remote and mysterious or a God near at hand, totally surrounding me? Do I feel “outside” the mystery of God’s presence and love or do I envision myself as an active partner within the drama of God’s love?*



4. ECCLESIAL CONVERSION

"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His Body, which is the Church of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the Word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been made manifest to His holy ones..." (Colossians 1:24-26)

- *As I contemplate the creating God, am I grateful for all that He has made and every aspect of my physical being and the reality of the world in which I live? Do I respect the wonder of His fingerprints in every aspect of creation and in every human life, even people with whom I find it difficult to relate? Do I let myself be moved to tears over the wonder of creation with all of its curiosity and wonder?*

- *When I pray to and through the Lord Jesus, the Christ, am I seeking connection with Him as the Man of Nazareth, trying to recreate Gospel experience or am I seeking an encounter with the Glorified Lord who shares with me His victory but also His wounds? Do I engage with Him in sharing my wounds, loneliness and fear? Do I let Him console, embrace and heal me? Is Christ Jesus a suffering servant whose presence I see and feel in the pain of all who are physically or psychologically in distress? Do I strive to let my own pain be a means of communion with Him and all members of His Body? Do I have a servant's heart?*

- *How open am I to the mystery of the Holy Spirit speaking within my life experiences, inspiring and suggesting new ways of thinking or acting? Do I trust the inspirations and guidance of the Spirit? Do I want to hear the Holy Spirit speaking through others?*

- *In my prayer, can I rest in the relationships among the three persons of our one God?*

- *Do I believe and love the presence of the Lord in the mystery of the Church? In my experience of Eucharist do I seek to be immersed evermore deeply into the Lord's Body, the Church? Do I see the Church more as an institution or organization of which I am a part or do I desire to see and experience the Church in the immediacy of every encounter of prayer or service?*

- *Have I been hurt by the Church – by individuals in authority or by other members of the body of the Church? Have I been able to forgive these people (or the Church as a whole) and love the Church in its brokenness and imperfection? Am I conscious of having been a negative influence on others by my own words or deeds? Do I pray for the peace and harmony of God's people throughout the world? Do I remember others are lifting up their pain for me and do I offer my own pain as a sacrifice of love on their behalf?*

- *Do I try to think with the mind and heart of the whole Church throughout the world? Do I truly pray with and for our Holy Father, our Bishop and all who have leadership roles within the Church? Am I grateful for all those who have sacrificed their lives for the Church, many of whom now are almost forgotten in health care facilities?*

- *Am I prayerfully in communion with members of the Church suffering persecution? Do I pray for vocations to every state of life? Do I truly believe my holiness, joy and wholeness are connected with the spiritual and physical well-being of all of my brothers and sisters?*

- *Have I had a conversion to "the poor"? That is, do I follow the example and words of Pope Francis,*

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searching for the Lord in all who are marginalized in any way (economically, educationally, geographically etc.)? Does the plight of migrants and refugees affect my heart?

5. CONVERSION TO THE EARTH

“Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning and in labor pains even until now and not only that, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we await adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”

(Romans 8:18-22)

“The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast. For this reason the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion,” whereby the effects of their encounter

with Jesus Christ become evident with their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”
(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* article 217)

- *Do I truly believe that I am a steward of the gift of life? Do I rejoice in the fact that I share the same dynamic pulse of energy with every aspect of creation? Do I stand in wonder and awe before the mystery of God at work in the beauty and wonder of nature itself? Do I believe I am sharing this world with every other person and have no special claim on any of the elements of nature?*
- *Do I remember that I come from the dust and return to the dust; can I find peace in remembering my origin and destiny? Do I see ways that I could be less wasteful and more conscious of conserving natural resources?*
- *Am I weighed down with possessions? Am I a selfish person – with the way I use my time or resources?*
- *Do I see the sacramental potential of nature itself and pray with gratitude that all things and all people might reach their full potential? Does my own hunger and thirst help me to be more attentive to the desires and needs of all of my brothers and sisters, many of whom – most of whom – have so little by comparison to myself? Do I bless the Lord before and after meals?*

6. EUCHARISTIC TRANSFORMATION AND DAILY CONVERSION

"It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exultation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God Himself became man and gave himself as food for His creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above but from within. He comes that we might find Him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe... an act of cosmic love... The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to Him in blessed and undivided adoration... On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday... heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the 'first day' of the new creation... It also proclaims 'man's eternal rest in God.'" (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, articles 236-237)

- *The Holy Eucharist celebrates conversion – the change of bread and wine but also the transformation of our own minds and hearts and the formation of the Church. The sharing of one loaf and the one cup reminds us of our destiny and the only way to reach that goal - by being in solidarity with the whole Body of Christ. Am I conscious of that dynamism at work within myself and with all those who gather around the Lord's table with me? Am I prayerfully concerned about brothers and sisters who are not present at the table with us?*

- *Do I understand the importance of rest and leisure, contemplation and quiet meditation? Am I a peaceful person, open to gift and mystery and the Eucharist unfolding through a life of gratitude and self-sacrifice? When I celebrate the Eucharist, am I praying for my own conversion and that of the world?*

- *Can I live with the reality of failure and loss and that many times I fall back into the same addictive patterns of judging and acting? Do I pray at the Eucharist for the healing of all who are overwhelmed with addiction? Does my hunger for Eucharistic communion remind me of the unfulfilled hunger and thirsts of the Lord's Body throughout the world? Do I pray that out of my own diminishment of body or spirit the wholeness of the Body of Christ might be strengthened and deepened?*

7. EVER-WIDENING CIRCLES OF CONVERSION

Whenever anyone undergoes a significant change (returning to the worshipping community, turning away from addictive behavior, choosing to let go of anger, etc.) the dynamics of relationships are altered and every party must adjust. Often the new resolve and firm conviction of another summons us to consider a similar change of mind, heart or pattern of behavior. For example, might the conversion of the "Good Thief" have softened the bitterness of the other thief? Consider Jonah, the reluctant prophet: did not the repentance of Nineveh convert him and help him see the wideness of God's mercy? The conversion of the woman at the well in John 4 changed her whole town and who can guess the impact of Zaccheus' conversion on the city of Jericho! Certainly the conversion experience of Saul required Ananias' conversion; as well, a willingness to baptize Saul and welcome him into the community. Where would the Church be today without the writings of Augustine or Merton? One conversion paves the way for many others!

- *Think about people who modelled conversion of any kind and thus changed your life (one of your parents, a teacher or a fellow student, a person coming out of addiction). Thank God for their "wordless" example of humility and perseverance. Consider also the times and ways God may have used your own witness of a converted heart to challenge or encourage someone to change their ways; thank God for shining through you.*

- Does the quality of my lifestyle, work ethic and commitment to prayer give evidence of my desire to grow spiritually each day? Would any aspect of my lifestyle cause a negative chain reaction (for example, gossip, selfishness, being judgmental or close-minded)?
- Am I pure of heart in how I approach every encounter? Does my ego ever get in the way of the Lord?
- Can I be peacefully content to “let go” of anything or anyone so as to be totally available for God?

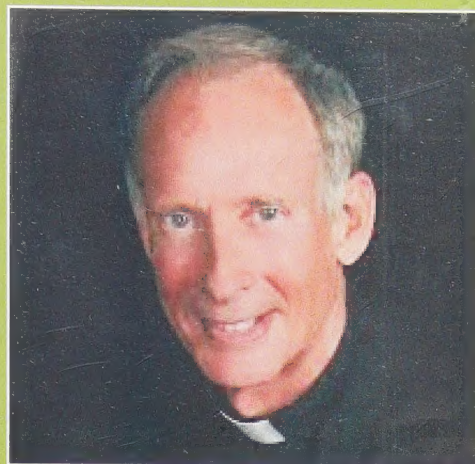
CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Change happens constantly, whether we like it or not. Conversion happens as we choose to participate in the process of change unfolding within us and around us. In conversion we often set aside our tendencies to isolationism and seek to “know together,” to see ourselves within the mystery and power of God’s love for all creation. The journey inward is at one and the same time a journey outward. A personal conversion of conscience manifests itself in words and deeds. Decisions of personal conscience and even the smallest initial halting step of conversion can have an enormous impact on the rest of the Church, building up the Body of Christ.

To everything there is a season. To live is to turn. To love is to turn. Conversion is at the heart of God and of all relationships of love. Turn, turn, turn.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty and Eternal Father whose goodness cannot be measured or limited by human time or space, continue to share with us the loving and healing presence of your wounded and victorious Son. Make our hearts more His – full of the love, mercy and peace of your Holy Spirit. As you are always turned toward one another in perfect giving and receiving, may we who contemplate the mystery of love joyfully embrace your gentle invitation to conversion and renewal each day until we share the fullness of transformed, risen life with you and all the saints as you live and reign Father, Son and Holy Spirit one God forever and ever. Amen.



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Ordained July 1, 1978 for the Archdiocese of Detroit, Msgr. John Zenz received a Doctorate in Spirituality from the Gregorian University in Rome in 1984. He served in various capacities in the Archdiocese including Moderator of the Curia, Vicar General and Episcopal Vicar for one of the four Regions of the Archdiocese. Since 2008 he has been pastor of Holy Name Parish, Birmingham. He became Executive Editor of Human Development Magazine in May 2015.



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